

# KASTURBA




Gandhiji in his Foreword said:

It seems to me that the root cause which attracted the public to Kasturba was her ability to lose herself in me. I never insisted on this self-abnegation. She developed this quality on her own. At first I did not even know that she had it in her. According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure she would do as she wished. This led to short or long periods of estrangement between us. But as my public life expanded, my wife bloomed forth and deliberately lost herself in my work. As time passed, I and my service of the people became one. She slowly merged herself in my activities. Perhaps Indian soil loves this quality most in a wife. Be it as it may, to me this seems to be the foremost reason for her popularity.









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# KASTURBA

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

*by*  
SUSHILA NAYAR



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
AHMEDABAD-14

*First Edition, 5,000 Copies, March 1960*

*Rupee 1.50*

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Printed and Published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai,  
Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad-14



## INTRODUCTION

Soon after Kasturba's death in detention in February, 1944, Gandhiji asked me to write down my reminiscences of her. I started writing in prison, but was unable to finish it till after our abrupt release in May the same year. The original was written in Hindi and appeared as second part of Kasturba's biography published in various languages. First published in the United States of America as a Pendle Hill publication in 1948, this book is a free translation of my portion of that biography. In the year 1946 I was in Noakhali engaged in Gandhiji's peace mission following the pre-independence communal holocaust that had disrupted all organised life in that district. A few miles from my camp at Chandipur where Gandhiji had posted me was a Quaker camp. One day they needed medical assistance and came to me. This resulted in a friendship with an American lady in the Quaker camp, who had married an Englishman. She was keenly interested in Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi. I gave her the English translation of my reminiscences of Kasturba to read. She took it back with her when she returned to America to share it with her husband who was at Pendle Hill. In January 1948 I received a telegram from Pendle Hill asking for my permission to publish it as a "contribution towards international understanding." I showed the telegram to Gandhiji who scribbled on it in pencil, "They may do so." By the time the book was published, he was no more. He had however read the original as well as the English translation.

What appears as Gandhiji's foreword to this book is also a free translation of the relevant portion of the foreword that he wrote in Gujarati for the biography mentioned above.

SUSHILA NAYAR



## FOREWORD

It seems to me that the root cause which attracted the public to Kasturba was her ability to lose herself in me. I never insisted on this self-abnegation. She developed this quality on her own. At first I did not even know that she had it in her. According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure she would do as she wished. This led to short or long periods of estrangement between us. But as my public life expanded, my wife bloomed forth and deliberately lost herself in my work. As time passed, I and my service of the people became one. She slowly merged herself in my activities. Perhaps Indian soil loves this quality most in a wife. Be it as it may, to me this seems to be the foremost reason for her popularity.

What developed the self-abnegation in her to the highest level was our Brahmacharya. The latter turned out to be more natural for her than for me. She was not aware of it at first. I made a resolve and Ba, as she was affectionately called, accepted it as her own. Thenceforward we became true friends. From 1906, really speaking from 1901, Ba had no other interest in staying with me except to help me in my work. She could not live away from me. She would have had no difficulty, if she had wished, in staying away from me. But as a woman and wife she considered it her duty to lose herself in me ever after. She did not cease looking after me till her last breath.

M. K. GANDHI

## PERSONS REFERRED TO IN THE BOOK

Ba: means mother in Gujarati. In this book used for Kasturba Gandhi who was universally known by that name.

Bapu: means father in Gujarati. It was the name by which Gandhiji was called by his close co-workers and colleagues.

Balkrishna: the child Krishna — the Hindu god.

Devadas Gandhi: Gandhiji's youngest son.

Durgabehn: wife of Mahadev Desai.

Gilder, Dr.: a leading Parsi Congressman from Bombay; twice Health Minister of Bombay State.

Harilal Gandhi: Gandhiji's eldest son.

Jaysukhlal Gandhi: Gandhiji's nephew and Manu Gandhi's father.

Kakasaheb .Kalelkar: one of Gandhiji's co-workers.

Kanu: Gandhiji's grandson.

Kanu Gandhi: Gandhiji's grand-nephew.

Kateli: Jail Superintendent of Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp.

Khurshedbehn: grand-daughter of Dadabhai Naoroji and a member of Gandhiji's staff.

Kishorlalbhai: Gandhiji's leading co-worker, later editor of Gandhiji's weekly *Harijan*.

Mahatma: means great soul.

Mahadev Desai: Gandhiji's secretary.

Manibehn: daughter of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Manilal Gandhi: Gandhiji's second son.

Manu: grand-niece of Gandhiji.

Mirabehn (Miss Slade): daughter of Admiral Slade of the British Navy who left her home to join Gandhiji's Ashram.



Mohan: a grandson of Gandhiji.

Motiba: means grandmother in Gujarati

Mridulabehn: daughter of a textile king of Ahmedabad. She took to hand-spun and dedicated herself to India's freedom struggle.

Naidu, Mrs.: poetess; member of the Congress Working Committee and later Governor of the Uttar Pradesh.

Narayan: son of Mahadev Desai.

Prabhavati: wife of Jayaprakash Narayan, the Indian socialist leader.

Premabehn: a lady member of Gandhiji's Ashram.

Ramdas Gandhi: third son of Gandhiji.

Ramibehn: a grand-daughter of Gandhiji.

Ramu: a grandson of Gandhiji.

Shah, Col.: the jail doctor at the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp.

Swami Anand: a member of Gandhiji's Ashram.

Shantikumar: son of Seth Narottam Morarji, the founder of Scindia Steam Navigation Company.

Sita: the heroine of the ancient epic of Ramayana.

Savitri: one of the heroines mentioned in the epic of Mahabharata, who by her single-minded devotion and love towards her husband made Yama, the god of death, to restore to life and to her her dead husband.

Vallabhbhai Patel: the Congress leader, Deputy Prime Minister of the Indian Union after independence.

## INDIAN WORDS

*Amavasya*: moonless night.

*Anasaktiyoga*: The name given to Gandhiji's translation of the Gita meaning the gospel of selfless action.

*Arati*: Worship by waving lights round the object of worship.

*Ashram*: A retreat, or a community centre.

*Ashram Bhajanawali*: A book of devotional hymns.

*Aya*: Untrained nurse.

*Behn*: Hindustani for sister.

*Bhagawata*: An Indian scripture.

*Bhai*: Hindustani for brother.

*Brahmacharya*: Self-control in thought, word and deed, especially used in connection with sex.

*Chapati*: A thin, flat, unleavened bread made of wheat flour.

*Chappal*: Sandals, shoes.

*Darbar*: Court.

*Darshan*: Seeing face to face.

*Dharma*: Duty.

*Dharmashala*: A free public inn.

*Ekadashi*: Eleventh day of the lunar cycle, observed by the devout by fasting and prayer.

*Hakim*: One who practises the Unani system of medicine.

*Harijans*: Literally means people of God; the name given by Gandhiji to untouchables.

*Janmashtami*: Birth-day of Lord Krishna, which falls on the eighth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Shravana.

*Ji*: A suffix connoting respect.

*Khadi*: Hand-spun and hand-woven cloth.



*Makar Sankranti day*: The festive day when the sun passes into the sign *Capri-cornus* of the Zodiac.

*Mantra*: Scriptural verses.

*Purnima*: Full-moon night.

*Ramadhun*: Repetitive chanting of God's name.

*Ramayana*: Indian ancient epic narrating the story of Rama's exile in fulfilment of his father's vow and his triumphant return to his kingdom after victory over the evil king Ravana.

*Sadhu*: A recluse.

*Sari*: The Indian women's dress.

*Samadhi*: A memorial at the site of cremation.

*Satyagraha*: Literally means holding on to truth. The technique of overcoming evil by the power of good or the power of truth.

*Shivaratri* Day of rigorous fast in honour of Lord Shiva, which falls on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Magha.

*Shlokas*: Sacred verses.

*Shri*: Hindustani equivalent of Mr.

*Vaidya*: One who practises India's indigenous system of medicine.





# KASTURBA



I saw Kasturba for the first time in December 1920, or thereabouts, during Gandhiji's tour of the Punjab following the inauguration of the non-co-operation movement. My brother (Pyarelalji), like thousands of other young men, had joined Gandhiji shortly before that. That had made my mother and the rest of the family unhappy. Ours had been a family of distinguished government servants representative of the old tradition, and they had been looking forward to my brother going up for the Indian Civil Service. Instead, he gave them a shock by becoming a rebel under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. My mother had asked for permission to see Gandhiji. She was going to him to request him to send her son back to her. Gandhiji in reply had sent her word to come to the place where he was staying at Lahore to spend a day with him and with her son. But when she reached there, she found both of them too busy to see her, so she spent the day talking with Ba and unburdening herself. Ba was all sympathy and in return narrated her own experiences and the hardships that she had passed through whilst following her husband's footsteps in the service of the country. By the time Gandhiji sent for my mother in the evening, she was a different person. She had been deeply impressed by what Ba had told her. She had argued with herself that after all Ba too was a mother like herself. If Ba could sacrifice so much, why could not she? So she said, "Gandhiji, you can keep my son for four or five years at the most, but send him back to me after that. I have lost my husband and he is the only light of my house."



Although I was very young at that time the picture of Ba talking to my mother on that occasion stands out clearly before my mind's eye. My mother had simply fallen in love with her. Gandhiji had twitted her for clothing herself and even her little child (me) in foreign clothes. He had also spoken to her about the vanity of attachment to the world. All that was perfectly true, but although it served to silence my mother it left her sighing. The air was too rarefied for her to breathe. With Ba it was different. She spoke to her from her own level — as one woman to another. Yes, the world was going crazy but one had to keep pace with the changing times. Everybody was passing through an era of unhappiness and one had to bear one's share of the burden and so on and so forth — all those arguments that go straight like a dart to the heart and into a lay understanding. For days afterwards mother was full of her talk with Ba. She was impressed by Ba's wonderful loyalty to her husband and her readiness to face any amount of sacrifice and suffering for his sake. In her eyes Ba began to rank with Sita and Savitri. Ba's sympathy and understanding had given her strength. My mother doted on her son and had spent sleepless nights thinking of the hard, precarious and stormy future that he had chosen for himself. But a day with Ba had shown her that he would at least have a mother's care in his new surroundings.

## 2

In 1929 during summer vacation I came into close contact with Ba. My brother had often wished to take me to Gandhiji's Ashram but mother did not like the idea. She was afraid that if she let me go without her I might go the way of my brother and never come back.

From what she had heard of Ashram life she was not prepared to go there herself. My brother persisted in his efforts. He said it was an added advantage that I should go there alone. I had never been away from my mother and he held that a very necessary part of children's education was to learn to shift for themselves as early as possible. At last my mother agreed to let me go with him on a short visit. My brother came to fetch me and the same night we left for Sabarmati.

I felt miserable at the thought of being away from home for so many days. At the same time the expectation of seeing something new made me excited and happy. From what little I had heard or read of Gandhiji's Ashram, I believed I was going to some heavenly place and my heart was full of gratefulness to God that He had given me the opportunity of seeing and staying with "gods" on earth. At the same time I was very nervous about appearing ignorant and inferior in the midst of such illustrious company. My brother had told me wonderful tales of the achievements of the children of my age there. He told me that I should at once learn the Ashram prayers if I did not want to look foolish in their midst. So I worked hard throughout the journey and learned from him the pronunciation of the *shlokas* of the evening prayer and got them by heart before the train reached Ahmedabad, our destination.

The journey seemed interminable. The longest range of my travel at that time had been from Lahore to Delhi, an overnight journey. After a full night and a day in the train, at last we neared Ahmedabad and I was almost choked with emotion as my brother pointed to me the dim lights of Sabarmati Ashram in the distance. We got down at Ahmedabad station. A gentleman received us, got down our luggage and saw us off in a

two-horse carriage. My brother told me afterwards that he was a secret service police officer who was on duty to keep watch on the Ashram and its inmates.

I was tired and it was nearly 10 o'clock at night. So I fell asleep as soon as the carriage started. I woke up as we stopped before a small verandah. We were in the Ashram. I learnt later that this was the verandah of the late Maganlal Gandhi's cottage. Ever since the latter's death, Gandhiji used to stay during the daytime in this house in order to console his widow and comfort his children.

Gandhiji had returned to the Ashram just the day before. Everyone in the Ashram had gone to bed when we reached there. Ramdas Gandhi, who slept on the verandah where we alighted, greeted us. My brother spread his own and my bedding on the floor on the same verandah and we lay down to sleep. This was my first experience of sleeping on the floor and for the first time I lay awake in bed, due partly to the hard floor and partly to excitement and nervousness.

I felt I had hardly gone to sleep when the morning prayer bell rang loud and, as it seemed to me, very long. It was 4 a.m. My brother took me to Ba's verandah. Bapu was having a wash. He asked me how I had liked the journey and then told my brother that hereafter I should sleep near Ba on his verandah.

Soon after prayers Ba took me to her room. The few articles that were there were neatly arranged. There was not a speck of dust anywhere. Everybody sat down on the bare floor for breakfast. Ba lighted a small stove and prepared some coffee. This was the first time that I tasted coffee. (In our home children were not given tea or coffee but milk only. The utmost that we could aspire to was cocoa.) I enjoyed my coffee very much.



Throughout my stay in the Ashram I had breakfast with Ba and she was so loving and so motherly that I always looked forward to breakfast time.

I felt terribly homesick. If I had not come in spite of my mother's opposition I would have liked to go back the very next day. There were strange faces all around. I could hardly understand a word of their conversation. Everybody talked in Gujarati or Marathi which were foreign tongues to me. Moreover, I was too shy to talk to anybody. I had always stayed at home with my mother. Both my brothers, who were much older than I, stayed away at school or college except for the vacations. I was educated at home. Being a lonely child, I became a bookworm. As a result I passed my matriculation much earlier than my cousins who went to school. But in other ways I was backward for my age. I did not know how to make friends and dreaded meeting strangers. I hardly talked to anyone even at home. In the Ashram I felt still more lonely and nervous. If there was anybody with whom I felt at ease, it was Ba. She talked to me sweetly in her broken Hindustani and looked after my needs. I never knew her to say or do anything which could inspire awe in others. With all her greatness she had a mother's simple heart and her motherliness pervaded the atmosphere around her.

Most of the girls and women in the Ashram worked in the kitchen department for an hour or so every morning. There they all sat, talking and laughing, cleaning grain, cutting vegetables or making flour *chapatis*. I went there with Ba and did what little I could. I used to be very bored, as I did not understand their conversation, and the work did not interest me. But Ba sat there, radiant and smiling, and finished

more than her full quota of work. She was an extraordinarily active person. Whatever she did was done with amazing agility and neatness and this trait she retained till the very end.

I hardly ever saw her sitting near Bapu, but her watchful eye followed him all the time. She saw to it that all his needs were supplied and those who rendered him various personal services did so punctually. One day I saw her going towards the Ashram dining hall in the burning midday sun. The dining hall was a good way off from Ba's cottage. On enquiry I learnt that she was looking for my brother. Bapu was ready to lie down for his midday rest, but my brother who attended to him at that hour was not there. I asked her if I could do the work for my brother. "No, he won't like to miss an opportunity of serving Bapu," she replied. "You go and call him, but mind you, if he is having his meal, do not say anything." The mother in her was not prepared to take the risk of his rushing through his meal or leaving it in the middle.

I did not know how to wash clothes. In the Ashram all were expected to wash their own clothes and I was determined to do what other children did. I found it hard to draw water from the well, so I washed my clothes at the Sabarmati river, regardless of whether the water was clean or muddy. The result was that soon my clothes became the colour of clay. Nobody, including my brother, had the time to look to such things, but nothing escaped Ba. She taught me how to wash clothes and told my brother to help me. She offered to get them washed for me, but I declined and began to wash them at the well. I found that somebody or the other always drew water for me when I went there. I have a suspicion that it was Ba's arrangement.

Towards the end of my stay at the Ashram, one day, as Gandhiji sat on the verandah of Maganlal Gandhi's cottage wading through the files lying before him, a group of visitors happened to come for his *darshan*. They laid their offerings before him and expressed a desire to see the Ashram. None else was near, so Gandhiji asked me to take them around. As I started, he called me back and asked, "Have you seen the whole Ashram yourself?" I had not. So he sent for some better guide to take the visitors around and I felt mortified as he rebuked me in his gentle manner for my ignorance. "An English girl in your place would have acquainted herself with her surroundings long ago. But our children have become bookworms. To pass the examinations seems to be the be-all and end-all of their lives. And if unfortunately they fail, that is the end of everything. Why should they bother to improve their general knowledge? After all that does not help in passing examinations." I was thoroughly ashamed of myself. It was true that I generally sat with a book in my hand, but I did so because I had nothing else to do. I did want to know something more about the place and the people there, but I was too shy to go and ask anyone to take me around. Ba came to my rescue here, too. She sensed my difficulty and told Bapu and my brother to arrange to show me round the Ashram, and the neighbouring city of Ahmedabad.

Bapu was about to go on a tour again. My holiday was fast coming to an end. I was considered too young to travel by myself. So Bapu decided to take me with him to Agra. From there it could be easily arranged to send me to my mother at Delhi.

From Ahmedabad we went to Bombay. There I saw the sea for the first time and was very excited about



it. I had lost my shoes in the Ashram and tried to get a pair at Bombay. But on that day the shops were closed and the same night we left for Bhopal *en route* to Agra. As we were crossing the railway bridge at Bhopal station Ba saw me walking barefoot. The first thing she did on getting to the place where we had been put up was to bring me a pair of new *chappals* which she had kept in reserve for herself and insisted on my using them. Thus I experienced her love at every step and I began to adore her.

At Bhopal, Ba was invited to see the Nawab's mother and she took me with her. She was not in the least affected by the glamour of wealth and royalty and talked to the ladies of the royal family with perfect ease. She carried to them the message of Khadi. Hearing her talk, one could not imagine that she was an almost illiterate woman. Though her knowledge of letters was poor, her general knowledge, her knowledge of human nature and life in general, was very deep.

From Agra I went to Delhi and, as my vacation was nearly over, after a day or two my mother and I left for Lahore. The Ashram life and my association with Ba had left a deep impression on my mind. I felt bored by what now appeared to me an artificial life at Lahore and I made up my mind to wear Khadi and live simply like the girls that I had met in the Ashram. My mother had allowed me to go to the Ashram on condition that I would not take vows of any kind. She had in mind the vow to wear Khadi in particular. Although I did not take the vow, I simply could not use mill-made cloth (foreign cloth had already been given up in our family) after my visit to the Ashram. My mother was annoyed at first and said she would not allow me to get more clothes made till I had used up

the ones that were there already. I had only three or four changes of Khadi with which I had gone to the Ashram. I washed one every morning and so managed to pull on with them for about a month. I had learnt from Ba the art of washing clothes and I had seen that even without ironing Khadi clothes could be made to look neat and tidy. At last my mother gave in and got some more Khadi clothes for me, so that I could send them to the washerman. I sometimes feel that but for this opposition at the start I might not have stuck to Khadi.

### 3

In 1930 at my brother's suggestion I again went to the Ashram during the summer vacation. My brother and Bapu were at that time in jail as a result of the Salt Satyagraha\*. Ba was touring from village to village seeing workers, visiting the victims of police excesses in hospitals, and in their homes and talking to the people to infuse courage and enthusiasm into them. She came to the Ashram for a few days during my stay there. It was a different Ba that I saw this time. She was worn out with incessant touring on foot and in country bullock-carts. The sufferings of the people that she had witnessed wherever she went, had made her feel sad and unhappy. But with all that, there was an expression of firmness and determination on that sweet old face. The loving old mother was now a soldier of Satyagraha engaged in a grim fight. She had not the shadow of a doubt about the justness of the cause and its ultimate victory. Her faith in Bapu's judgment

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\* Organized manufacture of salt without Government licence, in civil defiance of the fiscal laws as a part of civil disobedience movement for Indian freedom.

was implicit. She did not understand politics but she knew Bapu, and the fact that Bapu was leading the fight was enough for her to throw herself into it heart and soul. In her attitude was reflected the mentality of India's inarticulate millions.

From the Ashram Ba went to see her sons, Manilal Gandhi, Ramdas Gandhi, and some other workers who were undergoing sentences in Sabarmati jail. She took me with her. I had never been inside a jail before and I felt suffocated in that atmosphere. Ramdas Gandhi and Manilal Gandhi were brought to the jailor's office and the interview took place in the midst of police and jail staff. The hardships of prison life had left their mark on their faces and I was deeply moved to see some of them in convicts' clothes. But Ba had passed through that fire often enough. She had been to jail several times herself and the hardships that she had passed through in the South African jails were not easy to surpass. She saw the worn-out faces of her sons with perfect calm and enquired about their companions who were with them in jail. Suffering for the sake of the country's freedom had become so natural to her that she thought nothing of imprisonment for herself, her husband or her children. After all, there were thousands upon thousands of her countrymen shut up behind prison bars. Why should she worry about her sons?

#### 4

In 1930 Ba's youngest son Devadas Gandhi was imprisoned in Gujarat Jail in the Punjab. Bapu had put before Ba the ideal of extending the family circle to include all mankind and for years she had been trying to live up to it. Devadas was her favourite son but she came only once to the Punjab to interview him in



jail. For the rest she paid more or less regular visits to my brother and other workers who were in Sabarmati Jail and that gave her as much satisfaction as if she had visited her own sons. The joy and satisfaction of those who received these visits from Ba can easily be imagined.

My mother and I met Ba at Gujarat when she went there to see Devadas Gandhi. After the interview my mother took her to our village home which is four miles from the Gujarat railway station. Ba disliked processions and the like but the local workers wanted to take advantage of her presence in order to infuse the people with renewed enthusiasm. They improvised a sort of a procession in front of and behind her car though they had been requested not to do so. They could not believe that it would upset Ba. "But leaders like these things," they exclaimed. However when they saw Ba's genuine distress, they desisted.

## 5

In 1931 I again visited the Ashram in the summer vacation. Gandhiji was not there. I think he was in jail at that time. He came to Sabarmati after some time, but he did not stay at the Ashram. At the time of starting for Dandi March (Salt Satyagraha) he and his companions had taken a vow that they would not return to the Ashram till Swaraj was won. He therefore put up at Gujarat Vidyapith which was situated about a mile or so away from the Ashram and visited the Ashram for a few minutes every morning and evening. Ba also came to Sabarmati but she could not stay with Gandhiji. Women were not allowed to stay at night in the Vidyapith. She saw him for a short while every day like the rest of us. After 3 or 4 days Gandhiji went

off to Simla to see the Viceroy. Ba stayed behind. From Simla a special train was run to enable Gandhiji to catch the steamer at Bombay which took him to England to participate in the Second Round Table Conference. I went to Bombay to see the party off. Ba did not think of accompanying him to London. She did not even ask to come to Bombay to see her husband off. For years he had dedicated himself to the service of the motherland. She had been trying to translate into action the ideal that everyone of the 400 millions of India had as much claim on his time and affections as she. It was hard for her at first but years of striving had made it easier. It seemed natural to her now that Gandhiji should be accompanied by only those whose presence was necessary for the work he had to do.

Shortly after his return from the Round Table Conference early in 1932, Gandhiji was rearrested and sent back to jail. My mother had gone to Bombay to receive the party which included my brother Pyarelalji who had accompanied him to London. After a day or two at Bombay she went to pay her respects to Gandhiji and take his leave to return home. He joked with her: "You came to receive us. Now, why not see us off to jail and then follow us." My mother was not going to let his word be wasted. She unpacked and decided to stay on. She saw them off to jail and was later herself arrested while offering Satyagraha. For some time she was in the same jail as Ba. She has often told us how cheerfully Ba put up with the hardships of prison life. Little do people who have never been to jail realize how hard it is to be shut up in a place with the same faces around you for week after week, month after month and year after year. Leaving aside physical hardships, the mere incarceration frays people's nerves.

There are bickerings over little things, people become moody and small things assume big proportions. But Ba had become practically immune to these things. My mother told me that her presence had a remarkably soothing influence on her fellow prisoners.

## 6

In 1935 I went to Wardha and stayed with Gandhiji in Maganwadi for about two weeks during the summer vacation. I saw Ba labouring from morning till night at all sorts of domestic chores, visiting the sick, talking to workers about their domestic affairs and personal difficulties, and looking after Gandhiji's needs.

I happened to go to Wardha again in November the same year. At that time Ba's youngest son Devadas Gandhi was ill. He was suffering from a nervous breakdown. The patience and deep understanding with which she looked after him were extraordinary. During the summer of 1936 she took him to Simla and Bapu sent my brother Pyarelalji with him because of the deep friendship between the two. They used to be called "twins" by the household. Ba looked after both of them and my brother has told me that her motherly love and commonsense did more for Devadas than all the doctors combined. Her labour of love was rewarded. Her son recovered and she came back to Gandhiji.

## 7

In December 1937 Gandhiji fell ill in Calcutta. Dr. B. C. Roy was of the opinion that he should be accompanied on his return journey by a doctor. I took a month's leave from the All-India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health, Calcutta, where I was studying at that time, and came to look after him.



Things so developed that instead of a month, I stayed with him for about two years. Ba took charge of me as soon as I arrived at Sevagram where Gandhiji had settled by that time. She had one small room, a bathroom and a verandah at her disposal. She had my luggage put there and I slept near her at night. In the beginning I often got up in the morning and went away leaving my bedding as it was on the verandah. Ba collected it and put it inside without saying a word to me. Later when I came to know it, I felt terribly ashamed of myself. I don't think I ever gave her a chance of doing so again. I wanted to fold and put aside her bedding also, but before I could finish folding mine, she had done hers. If I went to do hers first, she came and started folding mine. She hated taking service from others if she could help it. Her standard of neatness and tidiness was much higher than the average. I often saw her rearranging the bedding and other things in her room which had been arranged by someone else. She did not shrink from picking up heavy mattresses and beddings just to fold properly a blanket or a sheet which had been placed underneath in an untidy manner. My brother tells me that soon after he joined Gandhiji, his turn came to help Ba in the kitchen. He found her a hard task master. The work being absolutely new to him added to his difficulties. She did not spare herself or others. Dirt and untidiness she simply could not bear. Similarly she could not bear irregularity and forgetfulness. Later in Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp, one day, she asked me to take out something from her little attache case. The bag had two latches, one of which was a little out of order and required some skill and manipulation to close. I took out what she wanted, closed the latch that was in good

order and left the other as it was. After a few days, she again wanted something from that bag. She was not well. "Bring it here," she said, "so that I can shut it up afterwards." "I shall do it, Ba," I replied. "You won't forget one latch?" she asked with a merry twinkle in her eye.

## 8

Ba was very particular to get up for the morning prayers at 4 a.m. In those days Bapu often had a nap for half to three quarters of an hour after prayers but Ba was busy during this interval getting his breakfast ready. There was rivalry amongst the girls in the Ashram to render personal services to Gandhiji. Ba loved to do everything for him with her own hands but she was too kind to disappoint the girls. She entrusted different duties to different persons, if they were dependable and obedient, but her watchful eye followed them everywhere and she saw to it that things were done properly and rules of cleanliness observed.

After getting Gandhiji's breakfast ready, she had it carried to his room by one of the girls and sat with him while he took it. Then she went to see whether the girl on duty washed the plates etc. properly or not. I have more than once seen her rewash the utensils washed by someone else. Her utensils had to be always bright and shining.

Ba had her bath etc. while Gandhiji had his morning walk, after which she studied Ramayana or Gita for one to one and a half hour. After that she went to the kitchen to supervise the preparation of Gandhiji's midday meal and while there she kept an eye on the general cooking also. Gandhiji had his meals with all

the rest. Ba served him and the guests who sat near him. After that she took her meal sitting near him on the other side but all the while her eye was on Gandhiji's plate. She carried a fan in her hand to keep the flies and the insects off, so that Gandhiji could have his meals and talk to the guests in peace. After the meal, which lasted an hour at least, she followed Gandhiji to his hut and rubbed his feet as he lay down for his midday rest and when he was asleep, she herself rested for a while in her own hut. After the rest, she sat at her spinning-wheel and spun at least 400 to 500 rounds (4 feet make one round) everyday. Sometimes I remonstrated, "Ba, you are not well. You should take more rest in the afternoon. Why must you spin so much?" But she would waive aside my objection with a smile. She felt that though she could not help her husband in reading or writing work, or in high politics, she could certainly further the cause that he had espoused by plying the wheel. After all, had not Gandhiji said that Swaraj hung by the thread of the spinning-wheel?

In the evening she again went to the kitchen, prepared Gandhiji's meal and attended him while he took it. For years she had given up taking a proper meal at night. A cup of coffee was all that she took in the evening. Towards the end she even gave up coffee and took a herbal substitute instead. While Gandhiji went for his evening walk, Ba went round visiting the sick and others in the Ashram. Often she would go for a short walk with other elderly ladies and meet Gandhiji as he was returning from his walk. Soon after the evening walk, it was time for evening prayers. Ba took part in the whole of the prayer including the singing of Ramayana. For the last, she would prepare herself beforehand. No student studied his or her lessons for an examination more carefully or



more regularly than Ba studied in the morning the passages of the Ramayana to be recited at the evening prayers. With equal zeal and interest, she studied the Gita. After the evening prayers, Ba held her *Darbar* as it were, on the prayer ground. Almost all the ladies in the Ashram would sit with her. Someone pressed her feet, someone else pressed her back and they exchanged the news of the day and gossiped for a while, if the word gossip could be used for their harmless chit-chat. Thus she sat for about half to three quarters of an hour with the ladies and then set about getting Gandhiji's, little Kanu's and her own beds ready for the night.

## 9

In those days Ba was looking after Ramdas Gandhi's little son Kanu. She did it with the vigilance and enthusiasm of a young mother. She knew a good deal of child psychology. The result was that little Kanu never missed his own mother. The grandmother was all in all to him. In 1938 Ba took part in Rajkot Satyagraha and little Kanu was left to the care of Gandhiji. The child was disconsolate at being separated from "Motiba", as he called her. Bapu had been confident of being able to manage him without much difficulty, but he soon discovered his error. The child cried for his grandmother all the time. One day Gandhiji said to him with a smile, "You take this rosary and count the beads reciting the name of Motiba each time. If you do it with sufficient concentration, I assure you that Motiba will come and stand in front of you." Little Kanu brightened up, took the rosary from Gandhiji's hand and sat down cross-legged, with eyes closed counting the beads. In a little while he came back crying "Motiba has not come." Gandhiji had to admit defeat and finally sent

away the child to his mother, who was studying at the time for some examination at Kanya Gurukul, Dehra Dun.

## 10

In 1937 Gandhiji had returned from Calcutta in indifferent health. His blood pressure was erratic. Everyone in the Ashram was anxious, but Ba kept calm and cool. We came back from Calcutta in the month of December. Sevagram was very cold. Gandhiji had for years slept in the open. But now as the cold and overwork caused his blood pressure to shoot up, the doctors had advised him to avoid both. After much persuasion, he agreed to sleep indoors. Before going to Calcutta, he had occupied a corner of the big hall which had several other occupants. Mirabehn hearing of his illness at Calcutta had vacated her own hut and made some alterations so that Gandhiji could stay there on his return and have the rest and quiet which he needed so badly. But Gandhiji was annoyed. "That hut was made for Mirabehn to carry out her Khadi work. How can I appropriate it for my use? And why should alterations have been made without consulting me? I would rather continue to occupy my corner in the big hall," he said decisively.

But there was no sleeping accommodation in the corner of the hall. Those who slept there were willing to make room for him but he did not like to disturb anybody. The only other place was the room prepared for him by Mirabehn. None dared suggest his sleeping there and we were in a dilemma. Just then Ba arrived on the scene. "Bapu will sleep in my hut," said she, and the matter was settled there and then.

Ba's room was small. There were one or two other persons who used to sleep near Gandhiji. Ba vacated

the room for Bapu and his companions and she slept on the verandah with her little grandson Kanu. She never for a moment grudged making room for others besides her own husband. Next morning as Gandhiji sat in his bed having his breakfast, he was in a reminiscent mood. "Poor Ba has never had a room to herself," he said. "This hut I had constructed specially for her use and I myself supervised all the details. I thought she should have some comfort and privacy in her old age and now I have taken possession of it myself. As it is, Ba has not been the sole occupant of her hut. She has given shelter in her hut to several young girls coming to the Ashram. But my coming here means that she has to practically give it up altogether. Wherever I go, the place becomes like a Dharmashala. It hurts me, but I must admit Ba has never complained about it. I can take away from her whatever I like, I can impose upon her any guest I like, she always bears with me cheerfully and willingly." Ba had come in as he was talking. He looked at her and smiled. "Well, that is as it should be. If the husband says one thing and the wife another, life becomes miserable. Here the husband has only to say a thing and the wife is ready to do it." Ba laughed and all joined in.

Gandhiji's blood pressure continued to be erratic in spite of his sleeping indoors. It shot up very high during the coldest part of the day. Under insistent medical advice, he decided to go to seaside for a change. Some of the Ashram people were terribly upset. "Is he very bad?" they asked each other. "Will he ever come back?" and so on and so forth. But Ba was unperturbed. She had been serving him as an ideal nurse and, since his return from Calcutta, she took hardly any rest herself and was always vigilant and ready to render any service



that might be required. She accompanied him to Juhu.

Gandhiji stayed in Juhu for about two months and the rest benefited him a lot. He went for a walk on the beach both in the morning and evening and Ba accompanied him as a general rule. Early in 1939, Gandhiji returned to Sevagram restored to health. Soon after that, he again had to go to Calcutta. Ba wished him godspeed. She never insisted on accompanying him when he was in good health.

## 11

In 1939 Gandhiji went to Delang (Orissa) in connection with the annual session of Gandhi Seva Sangh. Ba, Durgabehn and several other inmates of the Ashram had also come to Delang. Jagannathpuri temple was quite near and after the meeting Ba, Durgabehn, Narayan and some others decided to visit Puri. Ba was a deeply religious lady, and she had a living faith in the deities in the temples. She went inside the temple at Puri and worshipped the Lord Jagannath. Durgabehn accompanied her, but her young son was wiser and stayed outside. They returned to Delang in the evening. Gandhiji was very distressed on hearing that Ba and Durgabehn had visited a temple which was not open to Harijans. Ba was the first one to face the trial. Bapu walked with her in the evening leaning on her shoulder and asked her for an explanation. Ba was innocent as a child. She meekly said that she had erred and asked his forgiveness. Gandhiji's wrath melted away.

"The fault is mine," he said. "I became your teacher but I did not give you the time and attention that I ought to have given. I let your education remain incomplete. So what could you do?" After a little while he talked to Mahadev Desai on the same subject. "Ba's

childlike simplicity in admitting her mistake,” he said, “has captivated me. The Puri incident has hurt me deeply but I feel the responsibility lies with you and me, not with Ba or Durga. My failure I have often confessed, but today I want to talk about you. You and Durga are an extraordinary couple. You are friends. Why have you neglected her education? Should you not have taken the same pains over her that you take over your little son?” What reply could poor Mahadev give? He tried to defend himself but it only irritated Bapu. He saw his mistake and was so upset about it that he wrote to Gandhiji saying that he did not consider himself fit to stay with him any longer. The fact that an act of omission on his part could be the source of so much pain to Gandhiji was unbearable for him. But Gandhiji was not going to give him up in that fashion. All his life Gandhiji has laboured to show the path to those gone astray. A small mistake on the part of one who had been nearest to him for years could not sever the bonds. There were long discussions and exchange of letters on the subject. Bapu and his party returned to Calcutta, while Ba and Durgabehn went back to Sevagram. The discussions continued at Calcutta, and Gandhiji explained his point of view to Mahadev Desai. Finally, Mahadev relieved his pent up feelings by writing an article—a confession, as it were—in the columns of *Harijan* and there the matter ended.

## 12

During the summer of 1938 or 1939, there was an outbreak of cholera at Sevagram. I advised the members of the Ashram to take anti-cholera inoculations. I had explained to Gandhiji that as many of the village folk from Sevagram were everyday coming to work in the

Ashram there was a grave risk of infection being brought in. Just then some cases of cholera had occurred at the Mahila Ashram, Wardha, Kakasaheb Kalelkar being one of the victims, and the condition of some was grave. We did not want a repetition of the Mahila Ashram tragedy in the Ashram at Sevagram. Gandhiji talked to the Ashram inmates after the evening prayers, supporting my proposal for immunizing everybody against cholera by preventive inoculation. Several inmates did not believe in injections of any sort. They did not wish to be inoculated but no one had the courage to speak out. At last Ba came forward. "I am not going to take the inoculation come what may," she said most decisively. "Those who will not take inoculation," said Gandhiji, "might have to go into quarantine." Ba was willing to do that, if necessary, but she would not be inoculated. The result was that very few people in the Ashram took inoculation. We had inoculated practically everybody in the village, and due to our vigorous anti-cholera drive, the village was soon free from cholera. The Ashram escaped completely.

## 13

In 1938 Gandhiji went to Bardoli for a month or so in response to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's pressing invitation. The Rajkot Satyagraha was started during his stay there. The Thakoresaheb of Rajkot having agreed to give certain political rights to his people, had gone back on his word, and as a protest against this breach of faith, the people decided to offer Satyagraha. As soon as Ba heard of this, she came to Bapu. Rajkot was her own place. She must take part in Rajkot Satyagraha. Bapu gave her permission and as a result Ba was arrested



in Rajkot and put under detention. At first she was detained in a small village by herself. Devadas Gandhi went to see her there. He was deeply pained to see the way his old mother had been placed in solitary confinement with scant attention to her comfort and needs. But Ba had never complained about it in any of her letters. She had gone there as a non-violent soldier of freedom and she believed that a soldier should never fight shy of facing hardships. But the people were not going to tolerate ill treatment of Ba. There was public agitation. Ba was keeping such indifferent health that to keep her so far away from medical help was considered risky. The Government ultimately brought her back to Rajkot and detained her in an old palace 10 or 15 miles away from Rajkot city. It had a good garden and Manibehn Patel and Mridulabehn Sarabhai were sent there to be her companions in detention. Ba used to write interesting letters from detention. She was quite happy there. Only she was a little worried about Bapu's health.

Shortly after Ba's detention at Rajkot, Gandhiji decided to go to Rajkot himself. My brother Pyarelalji, Kanu Gandhi and I accompanied him. At Rajkot he was allowed to interview Ba in her place of detention. We were allowed to go with him. The Government had given her every comfort this time. Still she looked worn out. She could not bear separation from Bapu for any length of time. She tried to be brave, but her body gave way under the strain.

Soon after that came Bapu's Rajkot fast. The news upset her very much, but she had become used to such shocks. I was deputed to convey the news to her. Her face began to look pinched. "You should have at least told me that a fast was under contemplation," she said.

“But no one knew about it,” I replied. “Bapu informed us of his decision in a letter early this morning. He has left no room for argument.”

Without saying another word, she sent for the woman who used to cook her food and instructed her not to cook anything for her. “So long as Gandhiji’s fast continues, I will be taking one meal a day and it will consist of fruits and milk,” she informed her. This had been her routine during all Gandhiji’s fasts. It enabled her to maintain her strength so that she could serve her husband and at the same time share his penance and mortification of the flesh.

On the second or third day of the fast, Ba suddenly came and stood before Gandhiji in the Rashtriya Shala where he lay fasting. “How did you come?” he asked her. Ba told him that Government had sent her word that she could go to see her husband if she wanted to and so she had come. The Government car which had brought her from her place of detention had gone away after leaving her there and until night no one came to take her back. Obviously Government had contemplated releasing her in this indirect manner, but Gandhiji was not prepared to accept it. “If they wish to release her,” he said, “they must do so in the proper manner and release your two companions, Mani and Mridula as well.” He sent her back to the detention camp at 10 o’clock at night. Somebody remarked that the road leading to the detention camp was closed to private vehicles without a special pass. Bapu turned round to Ba and said, “If they stop your car, you should offer Satyagraha and refuse to come back. You will spend the night on the roadside if need be.” Ba obeyed him silently. What must have been passing through her mind at that time? It was not an easy thing for her to leave her husband’s

bedside while he lay fasting. Gandhiji had written a letter to the Government explaining the whole position. They dared not make her spend the night on the roadside. So she was taken back to the detention camp and the next day she and her two companions were formally released. They were with Bapu by 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Gandhiji's condition was causing a little anxiety on that day and Ba forgetting her own frail health and tired body lost herself in ministering to him.

## 14

From Rajkot soon after the end of his fast, Gandhiji had to go back to Calcutta and from there to Brindaban (Bihar) in connection with the annual session of Gandhi Seva Sangh. From Brindaban he went back to Rajkot breaking journey at Delhi for a day or two. While at Delhi, Ba had an attack of fever with shivering. I advised him not to make her travel in that condition but he was of the opinion that she would have a much more comfortable journey if she travelled with him and so he took her along. On the train, her temperature went up to 105°F. I gave her whatever care and treatment were possible on the train. She was carefree. She always felt perfectly safe so long as she was near Bapu. We reached Rajkot and with proper care and treatment, her temperature came down. After a few days, Gandhiji came to Bombay *en route* to the North-West Frontier Province. The long train journey in a run-down condition resulted in her going down with an attack of broncho-pneumonia. I had gone to Sevagram. Gandhiji wired to me to join him immediately. I found her very ill on my arrival at Bombay. But Ba showed a wonderful capacity for recuperation. She responded well to treatment and as soon as her temperature came down, Gandhiji



left for North-West Frontier Province. Ba wanted to accompany him, but she was too weak to travel. It was decided that she should follow him after 8 or 10 days.

Ba had great faith in my medical ability. Her love and simple faith gave me impetus to go up for post-graduate studies and to improve my knowledge of medicine.

On our way back from the Frontier Province, I stopped at Delhi to complete my post-graduate studies and take a doctorate in medicine. While I was working hard to get my thesis ready, I had a telegram from Bapu saying that Ba was ill and wanted to come to me for treatment. I immediately wired back saying that I would be only too glad to do anything for her. Ba arrived at Delhi by herself. I wrote to Mahadevbhai that it was wrong to have sent her alone at her age and in her weak state of health. Mahadevbhai wrote back saying that it was at Bapu's suggestion that he had done so. Bapu was wrong in that, I said. Ba rebuked me. "You are making a fuss over nothing," she said. "It was a through journey. Mahadev put me on the train at Wardha and entrusted me to the care of the fellow passengers. You all came to the station to receive me here. What was there to worry about? I had only to keep sitting in the train. Why did I need an escort for that?"

Ba was staying with her son Devadas Gandhi, and I visited her two to three times during the day to attend on her. Soon after her arrival, I had my Easter vacation. I had previously planned to go to Bombay during Easter to see some interesting cases in the hospitals there. Gandhiji had asked me to come to Sevagram during Easter, but Ba had come to Delhi simply to be under my treatment. How could I leave her and go? Ba was most generous. She told me to make use of my holidays

and go away. "You can go to Sevagram, I shall wait for you here." But I did not have the heart to leave her. I wired to Bapu to excuse me, and cancelled my programme of going to Bombay. She said she would like to stay with me for a few days. "You will recite prayers for me both in the morning and evening, and it will feel as if I am in the Ashram," she said. I brought her to my room in the hospital.

Delhi, towards the end of March and early in April, becomes quite warm. I poured a few buckets of water in the bedroom and set the fan going so that Ba could have comfortable sleep in a cool room. But she was too delicate and frail to stand it. She had a rise of temperature on the next day.

Her illness took a serious turn. She developed broncho-pneumonia, and there was recrudescence of an old B-coli infection. I was terribly worried. She had come to Delhi because of me and how could I face Bapu if she did not recover? We took her back to Shri Devadas Gandhi's residence. God was kind and with proper treatment she began to improve. Bapu sent telegram after telegram enquiring about her condition. He used to write loving letters to her everyday. They usually came to my college address. Ba brightened up when I took the letters to her. She had them read out to her first and then kept them under her pillow and putting on her spectacles, she read them several times herself, deciphering them syllable by syllable. I have no doubt in my mind that those letters played an important part in promoting her recovery. When she was sufficiently strong Devadas Gandhi, with his whole family, escorted her back to Sevagram. She had been completely restored to health, though she was still a little weak.

## 15

I was working in the Lady Hardinge Medical College in August, 1942. I had been working as a registrar while I was preparing for my doctorate in medicine. I passed the examinations at the end of May, but my term as registrar extended to the middle of August. I was contemplating joining Gandhiji when he returned to Sevagram after the All India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay. This meeting of the Committee passed what subsequently came to be known as the "Quit India Resolution" stating that it was "anxious not to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the United Kingdom", but that it felt no longer justified in holding back the Indian nation from endeavouring to assert its will "against an imperialist and authoritarian Government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The Committee resolves therefore to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines." On the 4th or 5th of August, I learnt from a friend in Government service at Delhi that probably Gandhiji would be arrested before his return to Sevagram. So I took leave from the Principal of the Lady Hardinge Medical College to go to Bombay to see my brother and Gandhiji. I reached Bombay on the evening of the 8th of August. My brother and Gandhiji had gone to the All India Congress Committee meeting. Ba had stayed back at Birla House and as usual was busy doing something or the other for her husband. I reached the meeting place just in time to hear Gandhiji's famous 8th of August speech. Everyone was surprised to see me. When I told them why I had come, they teased me for



being panicky. We returned from the meeting at about 11 p.m. Gandhiji held prayers after that. Ba had waited for him and she and the rest of us saw Gandhiji to bed and went to sleep ourselves after 12 midnight.

We all got up as usual at 4 a.m. for the morning prayers. Mahadevbhai told Gandhiji that until 1 o'clock at night there were telephone rings and various friends informed him that the police were coming to arrest Gandhiji. Gandhiji laughed. "They cannot arrest me after my speech last evening. The Government are not so foolish as to arrest the man who is their best friend in India today." Little did we know at that time that the orders for arrest had been passed long before that speech was delivered and if Mahadevbhai had respite from telephone calls after 1 a.m., it was due to the telephone lines having been cut off by the Government preparatory to the arrest of the leaders.

Everyone in Bapu's party shared his belief that he would not be arrested. Ba said to me, "Why did you rush from Delhi in this manner? You could have easily completed your term at Delhi and come to Sevagram." But they were all wrong. At about 5-30 in the morning Mahadevbhai came rushing to Gandhiji's room. "Bapu, they have come!" he panted. Bapu took the news unperturbed. "How long will they give us to get ready?" he enquired. The police officers gave half an hour. He quickly collected a few things that he wanted to take with him, and we all sat down for a short prayer. Mahadevbhai led the song हरिने भजतां हजी कोअीनी लाज जतां नथी जाणी रे । \*

The police had brought warrants of arrest for Bapu, Mahadevbhai and Mirabehn. My brother and Ba, they

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\* Not one who invokes the name of God has been known to come to dishonour.

said, could accompany Bapu if they wanted to. Bapu called Ba and said, "If you cannot live without me, you may accompany me. But I would rather you and Pyarelal stayed behind and carried on my work." That was enough for her. Without any argument, she decided to stay behind. Bapu, Mahadevbhai and Mirabehn were taken away by the police at 6 a.m.

## 16

The news of Gandhiji's arrest spread with lightning speed. People started pouring into Birla House and Ba was kept busy talking to someone or the other during the whole day. She was very tired. Gandhiji's arrest had been a sudden shock for which she was not prepared.

Bapu was to address a public meeting at Shivaji Park that evening. Ba announced that she would address the meeting instead of him and the people were thrilled to hear it. The Government also came to know of it, and the news came to us that she would be arrested on her way to the meeting. In her weak state of health she should not be allowed to go to jail by herself, was the general opinion of friends present in Birla House where she had been staying with Gandhiji. I, as a medical person, was considered to be the best companion that she could have. So I packed up my and Ba's necessary things. After that Ba dictated two messages to me: one for the women and one for the people of India in general. She dictated without a pause. Her ideas were clear, and the right words came to her without an effort. In her message to the women, she said: "Gandhiji poured out his heart before you for 2½ hours in the All India Congress Committee meeting last night. What can I add to that? All that remains to us is to live up to his instructions. The women of India have to prove their mettle. They

should all join in this struggle irrespective of caste or creed. Truth and non-violence must be our watch-words.”

At quarter to five in the evening Ba and I came out to go to the meeting. A police officer was standing at the doorsteps. He pleaded with Ba, “Mother, you are too old for these things. At your age, you should rest at home. Please don’t go to the meeting.” The whole thing sounded like mockery. Ba proceeded to enter the car and I followed her. So he arrested us both as he had come to know that if Ba was arrested, I would address the meeting. My brother and Khurshedbehn were to go to the meeting in another car by a different route. But the police overheard my brother’s talk to Kishorelalbhai on the telephone and arrested him also. Khurshedbehn made her exit by the back door and we learnt afterwards that she managed to reach the place of the meeting, though the police did not let the people hold the meeting.

Gandhiji’s last instructions had been that every non-violent soldier dropping on the battlefield fighting non-violently should have on him or her a badge inscribed with the motto “Do or Die” (करेंगे या मरेंगे) to distinguish him or her from those who did not believe in non-violence. Kanu Gandhi wrote the *mantra* on slips of paper and handed them to us. As he offered it to Ba, she turned it back saying, “What is the need for this?” The *mantra* was in her heart and she had always lived up to it. She needed no external symbols.

The car that was to have taken us to the meeting was commandeered by the police and used as a prison van to take us — Ba and myself and my brother — to the Arthur Road Prison. Ba’s face looked drawn and haggard with sorrow and fatigue. There were tears in her eyes. “Why are you worried, Ba?” I asked her.



She did not reply. I took her hand in mine. It was hot. She had fever. I tried to comfort her. "They won't let us out alive this time," she spoke at last. "Don't you see this Government is the very incarnation of evil?" "Yes, Ba, they are evil, but their evil will be the cause of their downfall and Bapu will come out victorious," I replied, trying to console her as best I could.

The car stopped in front of Arthur Road Prison, Bombay. Several pedestrians were walking along the road. They passed by without taking any notice of us. I was surprised. "Don't they recognize Ba?" I asked myself. "Are they aware of what is happening today?"

The gate opened and we were taken into the office. The matron of the Women's Section came in a little while and took Ba and me inside. My brother was taken to the Men's Section. Two queer-looking iron frames were brought to our room. Long wooden planks were fitted on these and we were told that these were the cots which were supplied only to class one political prisoners. Some dirty looking sheets were produced along with coir mattresses. I sent back the sheets but kept the mattresses. The wooden planks would have made too hard a bed for Ba with her own thin mattress. I spread her bedding on top of the jail mattress and put her to bed. Her temperature was 99.6 degrees. She was very tired and did not wish to have any food. Soon she was fast asleep.

## 17

At about 2 o'clock at night I woke up. I saw Ba returning from the lavatory. She was rather unsteady on her legs. I quickly got up and gave her support. After putting her to bed, I learnt that she had been having diarrhoea throughout the night. I had been dead tired

and therefore fast asleep. She was too kind to wake me up. I felt very bad.

The jail doctor came to our block in the course of his morning round. I asked for special diet for Ba. He told me to buy whatever I wanted; the jail could not supply such things. I had brought no money with me and neither had Ba. So I told him to ring up our friends in the city and get us some money. That was not possible. "Things are different this time," said the jailer. "Our orders are that you are to have no contact with the outside world." That was very awkward. "In that case, you must send me everything necessary from the hospital," I said to the jail doctor. "After all, we could order special diet for our patients in our hospital and I expect you can do the same here. If you cannot, I will request you to buy the things from your own pocket. I shall pay you back some day, when I am in a position to do so." On finding that I was also a doctor, the jail doctor softened a bit and promised to send me the medicines and some apples. I had decided to put Ba on apple juice. After several enquiries during the day, two apples arrived late in the evening. How much juice could I extract from two apples and how was I to do so without any means? No medicines had been sent. In the meantime, Ba continued to have loose motions and low temperature. She was becoming exhausted and I felt terribly worried.

She looked restless and unhappy. I tried to engage her in conversation two or three times but without success. The room given to us was very stuffy and smelly. High baffle walls raised in front of the verandah as an air-raid precaution prevented fresh air from coming in and leaking drains let in sewer gases. The room was damp and rather dark. Sitting there, we both developed

headache. The matron was kind. She said we could come and sit near her on her verandah. I carried Ba's bedding there and she rested for some time. But there was no lavatory there and Ba was too weak to walk to and fro from our room every now and then. So I brought her back to the room. She insisted on my going back to the matron's verandah. I went for a while to please her and then came back. In the meantime, it had started drizzling. Another lady prisoner, Mrs. Sitaldas, had arrived as our room-mate. She was the mother of three or four small children, the youngest hardly two years old and not well. Looking at her, Ba forgot her own worries. She talked to her sweetly asking her all about her children and her family and tried to comfort her.

She had become the Ba (mother) to India's millions. While the millions were passing through the fire, individual suffering did not count. Her misery and unhappiness were not based on any thought for herself. "Will Bapu succeed in relieving the sufferings of the millions of India?" was the question foremost in her mind. And the very possibility of failure tortured her. "Why do you worry, Ba?" I tried to argue. "Whatever Bapu has done, he has done with the purest of motives. He depends on none but God and God will surely bring him success in his noble task." Ba kept quiet. Her concern for the millions sometimes got the better of her perennial faith. There was a look of deep worry in her eyes and on her worn-out face.

On the first day, Ba and I had gone to sleep very early. We discovered next morning that we had been locked in at night. So, on the second day we with our new companion brought our beds out on the verandah. We were determined not to be locked in. The matron was upset and went to the jailer. The jailer advised her



to keep quiet. He knew we were not to spend the night there.

The air in the verandah was much fresher than in the room. The baffle walls were there, but at least we did not have the sewer gas smell to add to the suffocation. Ba was very tired and went off to sleep. Mrs. Sitaldas and I lay in our beds talking. She had with her the latest issue of *Harijan*, and I read it eagerly. We were waiting for Ba to wake up for the evening prayers. But she kept on sleeping. At 9 p.m. the matron came and told me that Ba and I were to be taken away at 11 p.m. I got up and packed our things including my bedding, leaving Ba to rest as long as possible. After getting everything ready I woke her up and we sat down to prayers. We were singing Ramadhun at the end of prayers when the jailer and his men arrived.

Mrs. Sitaldas had heard the story of my conversation with the jail doctor regarding Ba's diet. She handed her purse to me telling me to take out of it whatever I wanted. It contained about Rs. 20. I took out a five rupee note. She in her turn had forgotten to bring any coloured saris. I made her accept one of mine. Deep down in my heart, I felt a great relief. "Well, if now I die in jail, I won't leave an unpaid debt," I said to myself. Two years later I met her in Bombay after my release from the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp. Ba was there no more. I pressed her to take back the five rupees that I had borrowed from her. But she wouldn't. The money ultimately went into the Harijan Fund.

The jail superintendent had our luggage carried away and we followed him to his office. Ba asked him, "Where are you taking us? To Yeravda or to Bapuji?" She had put the same question to the matron, but there

had been no reply. Perhaps the good lady herself did not know. I thought the Superintendent, too, would not give a straight reply, but he did. "You are being taken to Bapuji," he said, and the reply brought great relief to both of us.

We were taken to the station and made to sit in the waiting room. I was feeling sleepy but Ba was wide awake. The noise and the din at the station went on as usual. Trains came and went, people came and went, the station officials passed by smoking and talking to each other, the coolies were heard haggling with the passengers. Ba had been watching all this carefully. Suddenly she turned to me and said, "Sushila, look, the world goes on as if nothing has happened. How will Bapuji win Swaraj?" There was so much pain in that question and in her tone, that I was deeply moved. "Ba, God will help Bapuji and all will be well," I replied soothingly.

The police officials interrupted our talk. It was time for the train. We were put in a first class coupe and the train started for Poona.

## 18

At about 7 a.m. the train stopped at a small station. A police official was there to receive us. Ba had become very weak on account of the diarrhoea which had continued during the night. The police official had kept a chair ready to take her outside, but she refused to sit in it. Fortunately, we did not have to go far. It did not take us more than a minute or two to walk to the car. In another half an hour we were at the gates of the Aga Khan Palace. The military guard opened a big iron gate and the car rolled in. Within fifty yards of the outer gate,

we had to stop again because of the barbed wire fencing which had been newly put up in honour of the illustrious prisoner within. The barbed wire gate was also opened by the military guard and the car went in and stopped under the porch. Ba climbed the steps with my help. Some convicts were sweeping the verandah. I asked one of them which was Bapu's room. He replied that it was the last one in the line. Ba slowly walked to Bapu's room with my support. We saw him sitting on his bedding which had been spread on a couch. He had a pencil in his hand and was revising a draft. Mahadevbhai was standing by his side and they were discussing something. They did not see us until we were by their side. Mahadevbhai looked up first and was happy to welcome us. But Bapu frowned. He wondered if Ba had weakened and, unable to bear the strain of being away from him, had requested the Government to send her to join him. He could not bear the idea that she should have sacrificed her duty to sentiment. "Did you request the Government to send you here or have they sent you on their own?" he asked in rather a sharp tone. Ba was perplexed. For a moment she could not understand Bapu's question. I replied for her, "Bapu, we have been arrested and brought here." Now Ba understood what Bapu had been asking. "No, no, I did not make any requests," she said. "The Government have arrested us and brought us here." Just then the police officer came and asked us to check our luggage. I did not want Ba to walk back to the porch. But she insisted on it. She had always been very methodical and very active, and the fact that she was again with Bapu seemed to have put new life into her. Hearing that Ba was not well, Mahadevbhai set about getting a bed ready for her. On our way back from the porch, after checking our luggage,



we met our new jail superintendent Mr. Kateli. He did not know that we had been in Bapu's room already. With the greatest respect and attention, he escorted Ba to Bapu's room again. We put her to bed and I wrote a prescription, which Mr. Kateli immediately sent to the chemist with a cyclist. But Ba's diarrhoea had been of the nervous type. Bapu's company was medicine in itself for her. The diarrhoea stopped with one dose of the medicine.

Ba got out of bed the next day and started doing little things for Bapu. In those days flies and mosquitoes and other small insects had become quite a pest in the Aga Khan Palace. Gandhiji usually went off to sleep during the massage, but here it became impossible for him to sleep unless someone kept the insects off. Mahadevbhai did it for a day or two in the beginning. Then Ba felt well enough to relieve him. She came and sat in an arm-chair with her fan at massage time and throughout the massage, her hand fan moved to and fro like a machine.

## 19

Bapu had been brought to the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp on Sunday, the 9th of August. Ba and I arrived there on Tuesday, morning. Bapu finished a letter to the Governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumley, on that day — the first letter that he wrote from the detention camp. Mahadevbhai made a fair copy of it and gave it to the superintendent for posting. In that letter, Gandhiji had drawn the attention of the Government towards the bad behaviour of the police. He had seen them manhandling a young man at Chinchwad railway station as he was being brought out of the station and it had left a deep impression on his mind. He had

also asked the Government for daily papers and requested them to send Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to stay with him. The Sardar was a sick man and had been under Gandhiji's care as a nature cure expert, before the arrests. His daughter, Manibehn, was his nurse, he had said, and so she ought to come with him.

After posting the letter, we all sat down to decide in which room to keep the Sardar when he came. Mahadevbhai was very pleased at the idea of having the Sardar with us. "He will laugh and joke and keep Bapu in good humour," he said. Mahadevbhai was terribly worried at the possibility of Gandhiji going on a fast, and the prospect of having someone who might be able to dissuade him from such a step was a great relief to him. Ba was also pleased at the thought of having the Sardar and Manibehn with us. That the Sardar with his inimitable humour would make the detention camp much more lively was the foremost thought with everyone of us.

On the following day Gandhiji started writing a letter to the Viceroy. He told us all to read his draft carefully and make any suggestions that we might think fit. We helped in making copies of the same, as draft after draft was revised, but the heaviest burden lay on Mahadevbhai's shoulders. He searched for references, filled in the blanks, made several suggestions, most of which were accepted by Gandhiji, and finally on Friday, the 14th August, he put before him a clean copy in his own beautiful handwriting. "It took me two hours to copy it, Bapu," he said with a smile. Gandhiji admired the beautiful uniform handwriting for a while and then put his signature at the bottom and handed it back to Mahadevbhai, who took it to the superintendent for posting. We all heaved a sigh of relief when the letter had finally gone.

By now, Ba had picked up fairly well. She walked about the house, peeped into the kitchen and spent a good deal of her time in prayers and in the reading of religious books. We were a happy family and the time did not hang heavy on anyone's hands.

## 20

On Saturday, the 15th of August, Bapu went out for his morning walk in the garden at 7-30 a.m. as usual. Mahadevbhai joined him during the walk and talked of various things including incidents of sudden death. We returned from the walk at 8 a.m. Bapu went to the massage table and Mahadevbhai went to his room. Ba did not come with her fan during the massage that morning. She was with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who was also in detention with Gandhiji's party. The Inspector-General of Prisons, Col. Bhandari, was coming to inspect our detention camp and the convicts were busy sweeping the verandah and Mrs. Naidu was busy arranging flowers in her room. Soon we heard Col. Bhandari's car coming in. He came up and went to Mrs. Naidu's room, where all the party except Bapu and myself met him. From the improvised massage room on the verandah, where I was massaging Bapu, we could hear them talking and laughing. I could clearly make out Mahadevbhai's voice. Suddenly the laughter stopped. Someone called out my name. I thought I was being called to meet the Inspector-General of Prisons. Just then Ba rushed in. "Sushila, come quick, Mahadev has had a fit," she panted. I ran. Mahadevbhai was ready to start on the final journey. There was no pulse, there was no heart beat. His breathing was heavy and laboured and was intermingled with groans. His face was twitching, and there were convulsive movements of the limbs.



I sent for Bapu. He also thought that he was being called to see the Inspector-General of Prisons. Someone said to him that Mahadevbhai was ill. But how could he imagine that it meant Mahadev's end had come? He came and stood near Mahadevbhai's bed and called out, "Mahadev, Mahadev", but there was no reply. Ba took Mahadev's hand in her own and called out, "Mahadev, look, Bapu is calling you." But for the first time Mahadevbhai refused to respond to Ba's and Bapu's call. I pushed in a stimulant injection but it was of no avail. Slowly the breathing stopped. The first sacrifice had been made at the altar of India's freedom.

For Ba it was hard to bear this bolt from the blue. She tried to be brave and joined in the prayers, but the stream of tears continued. Her world seemed to be going round and round.

The body was taken downstairs for cremation in the compound of the detention camp. Ba insisted on going to the cremation ground, although she was too weak to climb up or down the flight of steps. We did not think her fit enough to witness the cremation but there was no holding her back.

She had to see Mahadev off on his last journey. She sat on a chair a little way away from the funeral pyre, and with folded hands kept on repeating, "Mahadev, may God bless you, wherever you are. May He keep you always happy, my son. Your service to Bapu has been unique in every way." Every now and then she added, "Why should Mahadev have gone and not I? Is this God's justice?"

After the cremation we all returned to the house. It was 5 o'clock in the evening. Death-like silence reigned everywhere. Who was to console whom?

Mahadevbhai was a Brahmin by birth. Ba felt that a Brahmin's death in this fashion was an evil omen. Bapu's reply was, "Yes, for the Government." But Ba was not convinced. After a few days, she said to me, "Sushila, the sin of this *Brahmahatya* (Brahmin's death) rests on our shoulders. Bapu launched the struggle and as a result thereof Mahadev came to jail and died here. The responsibility for his death must rest with us." "Why do you entertain such ideas, Ba?" I pleaded. "Mahadevbhai has laid down his life in the service of the motherland. How can such a noble death be a sin? If there is any sin, it must rest with the Government because they arrested him without any cause. Bapu had not launched the struggle when the Government arrested him. He was going to carry on negotiations with the Government. But this Government is evil-minded. It did not let him do it." "Yes," she replied, but she was not satisfied.

Ba was a deeply religious woman. Nothing could shake her faith. She worshipped the Tulsi plant without fail. Mirabehn had a small image of Balkrishna in her room. She had put it on a small table making an altar as it were and used to arrange flowers around it in the most artistic designs. Ba visited the Tulsi and what she called Balkrishna's temple every day and worshipped them with all the solemnity of worship in a regular temple. Mahadevbhai's Samadhi was her third temple. So long as she had the strength, she accompanied Bapu on his daily visit to the Samadhi, walked round it, made her obeisance and came back. On Bapu's birthday on the second of October, Mrs. Naidu had arranged to have illuminations in the house. Ba called me and said, "Sushila, don't forget to put a light in Shanker's temple." For a moment I did not understand what she

meant by Shankar's temple. Then it suddenly dawned on me. Shankar and Mahadev are both Lord Shiva's names. "You mean Mahadevbhai's Samadhi, Ba, don't you?" I said. "Yes, of course," she replied. "That is Mahadev's — Shankar's—temple, isn't it?"

## 21

A cloud of deep depression hung over the camp. Sudden deaths are always most shocking and in a jail the effect lasts much longer. Finally, Gandhiji found a way of combating it. "We should all account for every minute of our time," he said. "We should keep ourselves so busy that there is no time for an idle thought, depressing or otherwise. There is no other way for non-violence to find its place in this world which is full of violence."

He himself always followed a set time-table with clocklike regularity wherever he was. Now he made a time-table for the rest of us also. He began to give lessons to Ba, teaching her Gujarati, Gita, geography and, sometimes, history. In the afternoon as he lay down to rest, he read out something or other to her and explained its meaning. Ba studied all these things with the enthusiasm and eagerness of a young student. At times, Ba expressed regret that she had not taken to studies earlier.

She took a keen interest in her studies but her mind was not young like Bapu's and she found it hard to learn new things at her age. Sometimes Bapu asked her questions about the previous day's lesson. As a general rule, she did not remember the answer and although Bapu never scolded her for it, she felt it keenly and worked hard to learn her lessons better. One day Bapu taught her the names and location of the rivers of Punjab. She came to me and said, "Sushila, will you write out



these names on a slip of paper for me?" I did so and she carried the paper about with her throughout the day. Even when she sat down to spin, the paper lay spread out before her. But to memorize things at 74 is not a joke. On the following day she could not repeat those names when Bapu asked her to do so.

Bapu taught her natural geography and explained to her all about the longitude and latitude and the equator. Every day after the midday meal, Bapu took up an orange and showed her the longitude and latitude and the equator on it, so that finally Ba came to know it thoroughly well. Later one day my brother, who has in the meantime joined us, was giving the same lesson to Manu who had been brought there by the Government as Ba's nurse at Ba's request. My brother did not know the Hindustani terms well and mixed up longitude and latitude. Ba heard it. "Sushila, what Pyarelal calls 'longitude' is 'latitude' according to Bapu," she said to me. She was right and my brother corrected his mistake.

Bapu used to read the Gujarati 5th grade school reader with Ba. There were several poems and songs in that book and the *ragas* (tunes) in which they should be sung were marked on the top of each. Bapu had a musical ear and a fairly good grasp of several of these *ragas*. He decided to teach Ba two of these songs and every night after the prayers the old couple sat down and sang the two songs together. Mrs. Naidu joked about the honey-mooning old couple. Bapu smiled and then went on with the lesson.

Bapu taught her the names of the various provinces of India and then the names of big cities in each province. She tried to memorize them but without much success. In answer to Bapu's questions, she would say Lahore was the capital of Calcutta or give some other similar

answer which showed that she had not been able to grasp the facts.

Slowly her enthusiasm began to wane. "Due to constant ill health, my brain has lost the capacity to memorize," she remarked every now and then. Still, she did not give up studies altogether. She began to spend more time in studying Gita. She read Gita with Bapu at midday and recited it with me at night after the evening prayers. This study she continued almost to the end.

After Mahadevbhai's death, Ba used to accompany Bapu regularly on his morning and evening walks. Bapu leaned on her shoulders and often walked fairly briskly. Ba could not stand it for more than a month or so. She started complaining of pain in her chest. Never was she able to go for a proper walk again. When she was a little better, she had a short stroll on the verandah, while Bapu walked in the garden below, and then sat down watching him from the top of the staircase. Sitting in her chair there, she read the *Ashram Bhajanavali* or *Anasakti Yoga*, for about an hour and then got up to have massage and bath.

Ba often read newspapers or *Anasakti Yoga* aloud. Her way of reading was sing-song. Bapu marked that and told her to correct it. The result was that she gave up reading aloud. With failing health, she was becoming extremely sensitive.

She was most interested in current affairs. In the afternoon, she used to come to me or my brother with the newspaper and we read it to her. What hurt Ba most was the British war time propaganda full of falsehood against Bapu. She was too unsophisticated to get adjusted to the ways of modern diplomacy. Sometimes when things were said by the Tory British Secretary of

State and other high British officials which, to her knowledge, were contrary to facts, she would be deeply upset. With her child-like naivete once she remarked: "Look at the lies they tell. If Mr. Amery were to come before me I would certainly ask him how he dare perjure his soul like that." This was said particularly in reference to the attacks on Gandhiji's non-violence, which as a day-and-night witness of his innermost being, she knew to be unwarranted and therefore could not tolerate.

In spite of her three scores and fourteen, Ba had the naivete and enthusiasm of a child. She retained the avidity to learn to the last. Whenever she saw someone doing something new, she wanted to learn it. Recently I happened to see Ba's diary of 1931-33. She was in jail most of the time during this period. I learnt that even in those days she had been a keen student. She used to learn Hindi from Mirabehn and Gujarati from someone else. Seeing fellow prisoners making napkins, she started making napkins. Similarly later at Sevagram, when she saw her little grandchild Kanu learning history and geography, she said she too must have lessons in those subjects.

Ba's writing was immature. She wrote each letter of the alphabet separately and the spacing was irregular so that an unaccustomed reader found it hard to make out the words. Bapu tried to improve it and for that advised her to practise writing. We had all sent for notebooks and Ba also asked for one. Bapu handed her a sheaf of loose sheet of paper and told her to practise on those. "I shall get you a notebook when you show some improvement," he said. Ba was deeply hurt. Bapu saw his mistake. He had not foreseen this.



He had only tried to practise his ideal of minimum possession. He tried to correct his mistake. But it was too late. The wound was difficult to heal. Mrs. Naidu sent for a notebook and I took it to Ba. She quietly put it away among Bapu's books and refused to use it in spite of all our persuasion. Bapu also tried to persuade her to use it. But she replied with calm dignity: "What do I need a notebook for?" To the end the notebook lay unused amongst Bapu's papers.

## 22

On reading through Ba's old diaries I learnt that during 1931-33 Ba went to jail thrice and every time throughout her imprisonment she had the Bhagawata and the Ramayana read to her regularly. In Aga Khan Palace, we used to recite two stanzas from the Tulsi Ramayana at the evening prayers. Ba used to sit down with the Ramayana in the afternoon and read with the explanatory notes the verses which were to be recited in the evening. She used to do the same in Sevagram. The explanatory notes in the Ramayana that we had with us were not very satisfactory; moreover, they were written in Hindi and Ba's knowledge of Hindi was rather meagre, so Gandhiji often explained to her the meaning of the verses after prayers. Ba listened with rapt attention. But with all her reverence for Ramayana, she had not lost her critical faculty. On listening to the narration of miracles, or what appeared to be an exaggerated account, she would say, "Surely this is not true." When we came to long descriptions of the grandeur of King Dasharatha or Janaka's court, and of the beauty and decorations of the place of Sita and Rama's wedding, she would remark, "Tulsidas seems

to have had plenty of leisure to have spent so much time on these accounts.”

Gandhiji decided that it would be a good thing to make selections and prepare a concise edition of Ramayana for Ba. So he started marking selected passages and completed it for the first two parts of the great epic. He asked my brother to translate them into simple Gujarati and write down every morning, in bold characters, the translation of verses to be recited in the evening. The idea was that Ba could make use of the Gujarati translation of the selections from the Ramayana immediately. Gandhiji himself used to go over my brother's translation and make corrections wherever necessary, but this did not last long. Gandhiji's fast, his voluminous correspondence with the Government, and looking after Ba as her health went further downhill, kept us all fully occupied. So the work of making selections from the Ramayana and translating them into Gujarati, remained unfinished.

During Gandhiji's fast, the duty of explaining the meaning of the verses recited at the evening prayers to Ba came to me. I tried to explain them in simple Gujarati as best as I could. Ba listened most attentively and whenever we came to some deeply religious portion, she would make comments. This time-table was followed regularly almost right up to her death. Two or three days before the end, she looked very tired and was lying down with eyes closed. I asked her, “Ba, would you like to have the Ramayana explained tonight?” She was annoyed. “Why do you ask that question, instead of sitting down with the Ramayana as usual?” she said. “You were looking so tired, that is why I asked you,” I replied as I went to bring the Ramayana.

“Listening to Ramayana while lying in bed, is not going to tax me,” she said calmly. “Go on, begin.”

During the time when Gandhiji had his midday meal, I used to read the Sanskrit Valmiki Ramayana with his help. Ba would come to listen at that time, too. Later on this reading had to be given up because of Ba’s illness. Gandhiji had decided to make selections for a concise Valmiki Ramayana also. In fact, he had already started making the selections and had finished marking down Balakand. But as with the Tulsi Ramayana, it remained unfinished.

Once another attendant suggested the reading of the Gujarati version of *The Story of Bardoli*.<sup>\*</sup> But Ba stopped her. There was nothing new in it for her, she said. She had lived through and participated in the Bardoli struggle.

Religious books deeply interested her. She sent for the Bhagawata Puran and had the whole of it read to her. After that, she used to hear the Bhagawata on special days, e.g., on Ekadashi day and so on. Towards the end, she again started hearing the Bhagawata regularly. The time for reading the Bhagawata happened to be the same as that for interviews. As a result, on interview days the Bhagawata reading had to be given up. Once there were interviews for six days at a stretch. On the seventh day I did not turn up to read the Bhagawata to her, as I was feeling very tired. I said to myself, “Ba will hardly remember it. I shall go and read it to her tomorrow.” But she did remember and sent for Manu and had the Bhagawata read by her. I did not have the courage after that to go to her and for

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<sup>\*</sup> Published by Navajivan.



the few remaining days the reading of Bhagawata was done by Manu. I feared hearing her remarks on my having been absent on the previous day. Today I feel sorry for it. It was bad enough that I had been lazy on one day. If I had gone to her the next day, she might have made some biting remarks, but in her heart of hearts, she would have been pleased. But I could not do it. I forgot for the moment the golden rule that we are all creatures of the moment. We should never miss an opportunity to serve. Such an opportunity once missed may never re-occur.

## 23

Soon after reaching the Aga Khan Palace Ba had asked Bapu, "When is Ekadashi?" Bapu requested our superintendent to get an Indian calendar for Ba. He promised to do so, but to get anything through official sources took time. So Gandhiji asked me to make a calendar and showed me how to do so. We knew the lunar day and the date on which Gandhiji was arrested. From that we worked out the calendar for the rest of the year and marked full-moon days with red pencil and no-moon days in blue pencil. From this calendar, Gandhiji could tell Ba when Ekadashi or any other day of fasting came. The calendar served all purposes for about a month. After that, a proper Panchang and calendar were brought by the superintendent.

Ba used to observe a fast on Ekadashi day. I do not remember that she missed a single Ekadashi. Similarly, she fasted on every Monday, and on Purnima or Amavasya, Janmashtami, Shivaratri and so on. Sometimes two or three such days came consecutively. Then

she would fast continuously for two or three days. She never thought of interrupting her fasts because of poor health or physical weakness. Besides the religious fasts, she would fast without fail on Independence Day, the first and the last days of the National Week, and on Quit India Day. Even during her last illness, she did not forget Ekadashi or Sankrant. On Makar Sankranti day she told us to send for some *til* (sesamum) to make *ladus* (sweet) and distribute them to the convicts who used to come from Yeravda Prison to serve us. Gandhiji told her that it was not right. "Don't forget we are in jail. These things are done at home, not in jails," he said. "But there is no home going for me," she replied. We sent for some *til* the next day, prepared the sweets, and took Ba to the kitchen in her wheeled chair. There the prisoners came to her one by one and she distributed the sweets to them herself.

Ba was not a learned woman, but she had mature wisdom. She was an ideal Hindu wife who placed her duty towards her husband above everything else. For her the essence of religion was to follow in her husband's footsteps.

Manu often asked Bapu to tell her a story during the walks. Bapu told her a few short stories, each having a moral. One day I made a suggestion. "Why not tell us your own story Bapu?" I asked. He agreed. To hear his story from his own lips was far more interesting than to read it in his autobiography. Many interesting details have been left out of the book. He told us of his childhood, how he used to play with Ba before their marriage, the marriage itself, his student days in England, return to India and then departure for South Africa. Bapu narrated how Ba had tried to overcome her orthodox

views and keep pace with her husband. "I must say the ladies in the family helped her in this," he said. "They would tell her, 'We might stick to our orthodox views and not allow untouchables into our houses or drink water touched by a Muslim, but these things are not for you. For you, the highest ideal is to follow your husband. Whatever you do in following him, for that no sin will attach to you. The result cannot be anything but good.' Ba always tried to follow this advice. I cannot say that her reason understood every step that she took in following me. But I have always believed that the reason follows the heart and not vice versa. Whatever she did, she did out of faith, with all her heart and soul and later on she was able to understand practically all that she did out of faith in the first place."

Ba was a regular spinner, spinning 300-500 rounds every day. She understood the significance and the importance of the constructive programme well. During her confinement in Aga Khan Palace, she could not spin much. After the first heart attack, I had to tell her to take complete rest. To persuade her to give up spinning and moving about in the house was a difficult job. "How can spinning do any harm to my heart?" she would ask. One day the Inspector-General of Prisons told her, "Ba, if you do not rest in bed, I will have to take you away to Yeravda." Ba was so simple that the trick worked and she promised to keep to bed. There was quick response and in 4 or 5 days, she began to improve. But the spinning-wheel had been given up for good. She got an idea that spinning produced heart attacks. Later on we wanted her to spin, so as to distract her mind from the thoughts of her own illness, but it did not work. She brought out the spinning-wheel once or twice, but she never took to it regularly again.



## 24

I have heard some people remark that Ba had not been able to get rid of the feeling of untouchability completely. All that I can say is that I never saw any trace of untouchability about her.

During my first visit to the Ashram in 1929, I had met a girl called, Lakshami. She was known as Ba and Bapu's daughter and Ba looked after her like a mother. On my return from the Ashram, a friend tauntingly asked, "Well, did you make friends with the sweeper's daughter in the Ashram?" I was perplexed. I had not met any sweepers or sweepers' children there. The friend continued, "Has not Mahatmaji adopted a sweeper's girl as his daughter?" It was then that I discovered that Lakshami was not Ba's own daughter but a sweeper's child. In Sevagram, Ba treated the Harijan servants like members of her family. She often remembered them in jail also. Whenever there was a discussion, she would remark, "After all, God has made us all. How can there be any high or low? It is wrong to entertain such feelings."

I must admit, however, that Ba had not been able to shed some of her old ideas. She had a deep reverence for the Brahmins. In Aga Khan Palace, the sepoys used to do a lot of household work for us. One of the sepoys was a Brahmin and because he knew cooking, he was entrusted with the work of helping in the kitchen. Ba had a particularly soft spot in her heart for him and often gave him fruits and milk, etc. She would not scold him even when he made mistakes. She would often remark, "After all, he is a Brahmin lad. We can do no Dharma in this jail. Let us at least give something to this Brahmin whenever we can."

But this partiality led to bad feelings among the other sepoys and the complaint was taken to the jail superintendent. They all worked for us, so “Why should one be favoured?” they said. The superintendent requested Ba not to give anything to anybody. But Ba was not going to give in so easily. She continued feeding the Brahmin sepoy on the quiet. “I give him things out of my own share,” she would say. “Why should others have anything to say about that?”

One day Ba asked him, “Maharaj, you are a Brahmin. Tell me when we shall go home?” Poor fellow, how could he answer her? He was thoughtful for a moment and then replied, “Ba, I shall look up the books and then tell you.” Whether or not he told her anything afterwards, I do not know.

This however did not mean that she had any prejudice against other religions. In Aga Khan Palace, there used to be one or two Muslim sepoys in the batch that looked after us. Ba mixed with them and was as nice to them as to the others. She would take their help in the kitchen also. She never forgot them when she distributed fruits and sweets on Hindu festival days and gave them things on Muslim festival days also.

On reading the tales of Muslim atrocities, narrated in the pages of history, she used to feel upset. Then she would think of Dr. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother Dr. Khan Sahib, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and other Muslim friends who were as near and dear to her as Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, or Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, and she would wonder how the things, narrated in history, could have taken place.

Similarly, consciousness of religion did not enter her mind in dealing with non-Hindu members of the Ashram.

But she was very acute and would find out who served her out of regard for her and who did it in order to please Bapu. She would not accept the services of the latter. Some people complained about it to Bapu and tried to give it a religious colour. Such a thing she could not easily forgive.

## 25

Never had imprisonment oppressed Ba so much as this time. She felt that the Government had arrested all of us without any cause. She was deeply grieved to read whatever news of governmental repression was allowed to appear in the newspapers. Detention without any time limit oppressed her. After Mahadevbhai's death she came to have a feeling that she also would probably not leave the jail alive. On 18th August, three days after Mahadevbhai's death, she expressed this fear for the first time. We were all discussing what each one would do on getting out. Ba put in, "Who knows whether I will ever go out alive? I am here now, but I may not be here by the evening." Bapu overheard her remarks. "Why do you talk in that fashion?" he said. "In a way what you say is true and it is applicable to everybody. Here is Sushila. She is young and has just become an M.D. She is sitting here now but it is possible that she may not be here by this evening. After all, this is how Mahadev went off while you and I, who have been invalids for years, are still sitting here. So you must dismiss all gloomy thoughts from your mind, take as much service as you need and make up your mind to get well."

But to do so was not an easy thing for her. During her previous imprisonments she had plenty of company. She would talk to her fellow prisoners, visit the sick, spin and sing and pray in company. Then there were



interviews and there was a time limit to the period of imprisonment. This time she was confined with a small party. We rendered what service was required and then occupied ourselves with whatever work each one had found for him or herself. She missed her friends with whom she used to sit in the Ashram every evening and talk. She tried to occupy herself in reading and writing, but she could not do it for long. Left to herself, she would often become thoughtful. One day she remarked, "Why should Bapu have pitted himself against such a mighty Government? They have unmeasured strength at their disposal and how can Bapu hope to win against such an adversary?" "Ba, Bapu does not depend on human assistance," I replied. "After all, God is there. Bapu depends on none but Him and He will see him through." "But even God seems to be against us at present," she replied. "Otherwise why should he have carried away Mahadev?" Bapu heard the last part of the conversation. "Mahadev's death is one of the purest sacrifices on the altar of freedom. It is bound to bring the day of India's deliverance nearer," he remarked.

But Ba was not convinced. One day she was feeling more than usually depressed. She felt annoyed with Bapu and said to him, "Did I not tell you not to pick a quarrel with this Government? You did not listen to me and now we have all to pay the penalty. The Government is using its limitless strength to crush the people. How long can the people bear it? What will be the result of all this?" Bapu tried to argue with her at first but she was not in a mood to listen to him. Finally he said, "Then what do you want me to do? Would you like you and me to write to the Government and ask for their forgiveness?" Ba was still more irritated. "Why should I ask for anybody's forgiveness?" she retorted.

“Then I will write alone if you wish me to do so,” said Bapu. The very thought was unbearable for her. She was angry. “Delicate young girls are shut up in jails and do not ask for forgiveness. Will you do so? There is nothing to do now, but to put up with the result of your own doings. We will suffer with you. Mahadev has gone. Next it will be my turn.” Gandhiji listened quietly. Whenever Ba was angry, he remained silent.

After a few days, she again broached the subject to Bapu. “Why do you ask the English to quit India? Our country is vast. We can all live here. Let them stay if they like, but tell them to stay as our brothers.”

“What else have I done?” replied Bapu. “I want them to quit as rulers. Once they cease to be our rulers, we have no quarrel with them.”

“Oh yes, we cannot have them as our rulers,” said Ba. “They can gladly stay as our brothers if they wish to.”

Next day, while I was giving her the massage, she said to me, “Sushila, these Britishers are very wicked. Bapu has told them to stay as our brothers, but they want to stay on as our rulers. They want to loot India. That is why they have put Bapu and other leaders behind the bars.”

Whenever Ba heard something new from Bapu she would tell it to me when I was giving her the massage on the following day. Similarly, if she read something new, she would tell us all about it. One day she read the story of Parsis coming to India. In the evening our Parsi Superintendent, Mr. Kateli, came to see her. “Kateli Saheb, do you know how the Parsis came to India?” she asked, and then she told him all that she had read about it from the book. Mr. Kateli was a

thorough gentleman. Ba reminded him of his own old mother. He patiently heard the whole story in a most attentive manner.

## 26

Gandhiji had been talking about the place of fasting in Satyagraha for some time before the August arrests. Many had feared that he would go on a fast as soon as he was arrested. Mahadev Desai had lived for six days after going to jail. All the time he had been worried as to what would happen if Gandhiji went on a fast. After Mahadevbhai's death, the idea of the fast went into the background. Gandhiji had called Mahadevbhai's death the purest of sacrifices on the altar of freedom. It may be that he postponed the ordeal in order to see the effect of that sacrifice.

As the time passed, the suffering of the people, the news of the famine and Government repression, made him restless. He lost his usual smile and appeared to be lost in deep thought and introspection all the time. How could he be a silent witness to all that was happening outside? How could he share the sufferings of his countrymen from behind the bars? How could he make the Government see the wrong they were heaping on the dumb millions? These thoughts possessed him and the possibilities of a fast began to loom large on the horizon.

The 28th of December, 1942, was Gandhiji's silence day. He prepared the draft of a letter to the Viceroy. Ba heard about it the next day. She knew nothing of what he had written. But Gandhiji's appearance had led her to anticipate trouble. She said to him: "Write to the Viceroy by all means, but please do not say anything about going on a fast." Gandhiji laughed. (He had mentioned the fast in the letter.) We all pleaded



with him to delete it. "Who knows your letter might quicken the Government's conscience and they might do the right thing? At any rate, they should not have a chance of saying that they could not listen to you under the threat of a fast." He agreed and, on New Year's eve, wrote to the Viceroy a nice little letter in his own handwriting and gave it for posting. While waiting for a reply to this letter, Gandhiji spent a lot of time in self-introspection and meditation, seeking light for the next step. Mirabehn said: "Bapu needs quiet. Let us make him a hut under the mango tree in the garden." Ba turned the suggestion down. "Where is the need for a hut? Bapu can experience quiet in any place." Bapu also said: "The quiet that I need is something different from the ordinary. I cannot keep Ba away from me. I do not wish to do so. I shall continue to stay in my room."

As Gandhiji's correspondence with the Viceroy progressed, the fast came nearer. The Government was intoxicated with power. It was not prepared to listen to him. The very idea of a fast was most upsetting for all of us. We knew Gandhiji's capacity to stand such an ordeal was very limited. One day my brother (Pyarelalji) came to me. "How many days' fast do you think Bapu can stand in the present state of his health?" he asked.

I told him it was difficult to say anything definitely. But at the time of the Rajkot Fast in 1938 his condition had become serious on the 5th day. "Judging from that he will not be able to stand a long fast."

Mrs. Naidu was definite. "He must not undertake a fast. He cannot survive a fast at his age and in his weak state of health, and the time for the supreme sacrifice has not come."

Ba looked worried. Mrs. Naidu tried to console her. "Do not worry, Ba. Bapu has said he will not fast unless there is a clear call from God to do so. God will never tell him to go on a fast."

"I know that," Ba replied. "But what if Bapu makes up his mind that God wants him to do so?"

Bapu sat in meditation for half an hour every afternoon praying for light. Ba also sat praying before the Tulsi plant for half an hour every morning after her bath. She prayed for her husband's long life and the success of his mission.

With constant worry, Ba's strength began to fail. She, Mirabehn and Mrs. Naidu used to go to Mahadevbhai's Samadhi every Saturday to offer flowers. Ba began to miss it every now and then. She found it hard to walk that distance. This caused me anxiety. "How will she react to the actual fast?" we asked ourselves. We were of the opinion that she was not fit for such an ordeal. Mrs. Naidu went to Gandhiji. "Bapu, your fast will kill Ba," she said. Bapu laughed. "I know her better than you all," he replied. "You have no idea how brave she can be. None of you really know her. I have lived with her for 62 years. And I can tell you that she will stand it better than any of you. At the time of my Harijan fast, Ba was with me. When I had lost all hope of life, I decided to distribute my few belongings amongst the hospital staff. Ba carried out my wishes and distributed the things with her own hands. And her eyes were dry."

In Ba's diary of the year, 1933, there is the following note: "I went to the hospital after my bath. Mathuradas was with me. I had packed the things in a basket. Bapu told me to give away everything to the hospital. I did so. He told me, 'I am not likely to survive this time.

You must not worry and you must not break down. That is the only right thing.' But God is merciful. He has always come to the rescue of his devotees. His will be done."

And her faith in God was well rewarded. The Government decided to release Gandhiji that very evening and the Harijan fast came to an end.

Bapu's estimate of Ba's endurance and faith turned out to be correct. He talked to her about the necessity of going on a fast one evening. On the next day Ba said to us, "How can Bapu be a silent witness to all the lies and falsehood that is being propagated? How else can he protest against Government's terrorism except by going on a fast?" We were all dumbfounded by her dauntless spirit. Bapu's fast was now a certainty.

## 27

On the 10th of February, 1943, Gandhiji had his morning breakfast. After that there was a short prayer and the twenty-one day fast began. On that day Gandhiji had his morning and evening walks, and offered prayers and flowers at Mahadevbhai's Samadhi as usual. Ba accompanied him on the walk.

She gave up having full meals and went on a diet of fruits and milk as she always did during Bapu's fasts. However, during the previous fasts, fruits and milk she used to take once a day only. This time, looking to the state of her health, we insisted that she must not do that. With the greatest difficulty and much against her wishes, she was at last persuaded to have two meals of fruits and milk in the 24 hours.

She used to take a cup of hot water and honey two or three times during the day. During Gandhiji's



fast, she spent most of her time by his bedside. She would sit with her cup near him and if there was anything to be done, she would put it down on his table, do the work and then come back and sip her drink. One day Dr. Gilder remarked: "This is not right. The officials might think that she hovers round his bed with the cup of hot water and honey so as to give it to him on the sly." He talked about it to Ba also. She was quite firm. "No one can entertain such doubts about Babu," she replied.

On the third day of the fast, Gandhiji started having nausea, so that he could not drink water. Ba suggested to him to add a little sweet-lime juice to the water. He refused. "I am not going to add juice to my water unless I am absolutely unable to drink plain water," he replied. The nausea and vomiting became much more severe. He could hardly drink water at all. His blood became thick, the kidney function began to fail. But Ba did not repeat her suggestion. She knew that Gandhiji would do what he thought to be the right thing. "Why waste his strength by arguing about anything?" she said to herself.

As the fast progressed, Ba spent more and more time in sitting and praying before the Tulsi plant or the image of Balkrishna. On the 22nd of February, Gandhiji's condition was grave. His life hung in the balance. I was by his bedside. Mirabehn came in and quietly took me to the verandah. There was Ba sitting crosslegged with eyes closed and folded hands bowing before the Tulsi plant. There was such a look of silent supplication on her face that it brought tears to the onlookers' eyes. We watched her for a moment and then came away. She was lost in meditation and was quite unaware of who came and who went.

The 22nd of February was the 13th day of the fast. Gandhiji had become so weak that with much effort he could hardly drink half an ounce of water through the siphon tube. The effort exhausted him and he fell back in bed in an almost semi-conscious state. The pulse became very feeble, he was cold and clammy. He had not the strength to speak or express himself by making signs. As mentioned above, Ba was praying before the Tulsi plant and I was the only one in Gandhiji's room. I shivered at the thought that the end might be near. I mustered up courage and said to him, "Bapu, don't you think it is time that you made use of sweet-lime juice, to make water drinkable?" There was no reply for a few minutes. I watched him closely. Then there was a slight nod of the head giving consent for the addition of sweet-lime juice to his water. Immediately I took 2 ounces of fresh *mosambi* juice and mixed it with 2 ounces of water. Little by little I poured it down his throat and he was able to swallow and retain it. As soon as the system received some fluid, the lifeless face began to show signs of life. He opened his eyes. Ba came in at that moment. God had heard her prayers.

During Gandhiji's fast, the gates of the Aga Khan Palace were thrown open. Throughout the day there was a stream of visitors coming to see him. He was too weak to talk to all of them. Most of them came into his room, paid their respects and went out. There they would sit with Ba and talk with her. Ba was amazingly brave. She never had a moment's rest throughout the day. Whether she was talking to the visitors or ministering to Gandhiji, she kept cheerful and smiling. Amongst the visitors came her children and grandchildren. It was a great solace to her. Following in her husband's footsteps, she had adopted the whole world as her family.

But that did not lessen her affection for her own children. They remained the nearest and dearest to her. During the fast, Gandhiji's instructions were that no visitor was to be offered any refreshments. For Ba it was hard to observe this rule, especially with regard to her little grandchildren. But she observed it.

At last the 21 days' fast was over. The Government would allow only the sons to be present at the breaking of the fast, not the friends. Gandhiji had ceased to make a distinction between the two for years. So he decided that the sons too should not come. The 2nd of March was the last day of the fast and therefore the last day on which visitors were to be let in. As they said good-bye, Ba's eyes became moist. Taking leave of Lakshmi-behn Khare and other ladies from the Sabarmati Ashram, she remarked, "This is my final good-bye, friends." I checked her, "No, Ba, you must not talk like that. We are all going out before long." "Yes, you all will go out," she quietly replied.

## 28

Gandhiji's fast came to an end on the 3rd of March 1943. Three or four days after that the Government withdrew permission to Ramdas Gandhi and Devadas Gandhi to visit their father. They had come to know that Gandhiji was convalescing satisfactorily. There was no danger now. So the original restrictions were re-enforced. The visits of the sons had been acting as a tonic for Ba. With the closing of the jail gates, her strength began to fail. It was her determination alone that had enabled her to put up with the strain of physical work and mental worry during Bapu's fast. Reaction now set in. She tired easily. She looked sad. On the 16th of March she had an attack of paroxysmal tachycardia which lasted for about 2 hours.



On the 25th of March she had another attack which lasted almost 4 hours. From then on her illness increased.

Before the fast, Gandhiji used to say that the situation was bound to change within six months. They could not keep people in jail indefinitely without trial. By the end of six months releases would take place. Either the movement would have succeeded to such an extent that the Government would be obliged to release the political prisoners or they would have crushed it so completely that there would be no need to keep them in prison any longer. After the fast he changed his opinion. He began to say that we would have to spend at least seven years in prison. This gave a shock to Ba. Every now and then she would remark: "I shall stay by Mahadev's side. I cannot expect to live for seven years more and go out with the rest." And yet her childlike simplicity and innocent faith would not let her give up hope altogether. She sat praying before the image of Balkrishna and begged for an early release for everyone.

One day there was a casual talk about cinema. A review of the picture "Bharat Milap" had appeared in the papers. Ba was very fond of this portion of the Ramayana. I said to her: "Ba, when you come to Delhi next we shall take you to see 'Bharat Milap'." Ba liked the idea. For a moment she forgot that we were in jail and far away from Delhi. "How can I go to see pictures when Bapu does not go?" she remarked. "No, Ba, this is not an ordinary picture," I replied. "It shows the story of the Ramayana. It is a religious picture. Bapu may not go himself, but I do not think he will prevent you from going. We shall take Tara, Mohan and Ramu with us." The mention of the grandchildren brought a smile on her worn-out face and she said, "All right," and we started talking about something else.

During Gandhiji's fast, Jaysukhlal Gandhi came to see him. He had placed his daughter, Manu, under Ba's care at Sevagram. She had also offered Satyagraha in 1942 and gone to jail. She was in Nagpur jail at the time. Jaysukhlal Gandhi told Ba that Manu's eyes were giving her a lot of trouble. "If she can be with you," he said, "her eyes will be saved, and she will have the advantage of serving you." Ba's motherly heart was touched. It seemed to her of utmost importance that the girl's eyes should not be allowed to deteriorate. So she took the matter up with Gandhiji. "I need help," she said. "Why can't we send for Manu?" Gandhiji tried to put her off. He did not wish to make any requests and give the Government a chance of saying "No" to him. But Ba was firm. She herself told Col. Bhandari and Col. Shah when they came next time that she needed help — a nurse. In the meantime she had started having frequent heart attacks. Dr. Gilder and I sent our report to the Government and added that she needed a nurse-companion. The Government pricked up its ears. Ba had asked for Manu who was in prison in another State. Questioned as to the next choice if Manu could not be brought to Poona, Ba gave the name of Manibehn Patel and Premabehn Kantak. The Bombay Government could not approve of either of them. So they wrote to the Central Provinces Government asking them to transfer Manu to Poona. On the 23rd of March, Manu arrived at the Aga Khan Palace. Thanks to malaria parasites, on the same day Mrs. Naidu was released on health grounds subsequent to a severe attack of malaria fever.

At the end of March, Ba had a mild attack of broncho-pneumonia. Early in April there was a recru-

descence of her old trouble B-coli infection. With proper treatment it subsided.

Manu was very helpful in looking after Ba. Within a few days Ba was better. She would come to the dining room and sit with us at mealtimes. Dr. Gilder and Mr. Kateli, being non-vegetarians, used to sit at a separate table. Mirabehn sat and ate on the floor. My brother, Manu and myself sat at another table. Ba would go to each table and see that we all had enough to eat. She would sit down and talk for a while to everyone. Cooking was done on the back verandah. She would go there and talk to the cook, making suggestions about various things. Thus she tried to mother us all. She had become the mother of the whole of India, and she was the mother of our little family in jail. She looked after everyone so long as her health permitted her to do so.

As Gandhiji recuperated from the fast, he started spending more and more time in correspondence with the Government. This left him very little time for teaching Ba or attending to other things.

## 29

Ba had varied interests and we discovered in jail that games were also amongst them. In jail we had made a court and used to play Badminton or Tenniquoit more or less regularly. Ba and Bapu had inaugurated the Badminton Court with rackets in their hands, tossing the shuttle-cock over the net to each other. Ba would sit in her chair on the verandah and watch the game with keen interest. If anyone tried to play foul she would shout and check the person. At night Mirabehn, Dr. Gilder and Mr. Kateli used to play Karrom. Ba would go and watch their game also. Slowly she her-



self began to play Karrom. She became so interested in it that she would practise for nearly half an hour every afternoon. Mirabehn was the best Karrom player. Ba was practically always her partner. So she always won and was very pleased about it. If sometimes they accidentally lost, she became upset and it even spoilt her sleep. Finally the players decided among themselves that whatever happened, Ba should be made to win the last game. She attached great importance to getting the queen in the game of Karrom. If she got the queen but lost the game, she considered it a draw. She used to so lose herself in Karrom that she would forget all about her illness for the time being. Towards the end, when she was too weak to play, we carried the Karrom board to her room and played sitting near her bed. This cheered her up. She had the Karrom played before her until 2 or 3 days before her death. With her illness, the Karrom players lost their fourth member. As Mirabehn was very good at it, Dr. Gilder and Mr. Kateli used to play as partners and Mirabehn played alone, taking one turn for their two and playing from one side of the board only. This often resulted in her losing the game. Ba could not bear that her erstwhile partner should be defeated. None of us was interested in Karrom, but she insisted that some one should play as Mirabehn's partner, so that she could win.

Ping-pong was also introduced. Ba tried to take part in that also, but the exercise made her breathless. So it had to be given up. Her body had become old, but in several things her mind remained fresh as that of a child.

Ba loved to play with children and look after them. In the Ashram she had always had one or two children under her care. That was not possible in jail. One day

one of the goats kept for Gandhiji for his milk supply gave birth to two kids. Manu carried one of the newborns to Ba. She took it in her lap and began to pet it, and gave it something to eat. Then she began talking to it almost forgetting the fact that it was a kid and not a human child. "Come every day to play, little one," she said as Manu took it back.

## 30

Ba was an excellent cook. After the introduction of the vow of control of the palate in the Ashram, Ba's art became useless, as it were. However, now and then she would prepare something nice. In jail she directed Manu to prepare nice things for Dr. Gilder's breakfast. She was fond of good food herself and liked to serve it to others. One day she told Manu to prepare *Puran Puri*. "I shall also eat it today," she said. "Go and ask Bapu if he will have it too." Manu took the message to Bapu. An attack of indigestion was likely to bring on a heart attack in Ba's case, so Bapu's reply was: "Tell Ba, I shall eat it if she does not." "All right, I won't eat it," said Ba without a moment's hesitation.

One day Ba had a heart attack which lasted a long time. On the following morning she asked Manu to cook some brinjal for her in a special way in ghee. Manu came and asked me if Ba would be able to digest such a thing. I thought it risky to give her anything but light diet in view of the previous evening's heart attack. She told Ba, "Sushilabehn has told me not to cook brinjal for you." This annoyed Ba. She was very angry with me and took the complaint to Bapu.

Bapu happened to be very busy at the moment. Instead of explaining things patiently, he just said to her, "I think you should control your palate for the sake of your health." This made her still more angry. She decided she would not have any cooked food. <sup>8</sup>Manu and I pleaded with her. "It was only for the sake of your health that we did not want you to have this preparation today, otherwise we would be only too glad to prepare anything for you." But she was not going to be pacified so easily. "I don't want anyone to cook anything for me," she said. For almost 15 days she had nothing but milk, fruits, hot water and honey. Manu and I felt miserable. But Gandhiji soothed us. "Do not worry. This won't do any harm to Ba. On the contrary it is likely to do her good." As it happened, Ba kept very good health during this period and there was no loss of weight. We continued persuading her and slowly she forgot the brinjal incident and returned to her usual diet.

## 31

Two days before her death, Ba had an idea that a dose of castor oil would do her good, but she was so weak that Dr. Gilder and I felt it would not be right to give her a purgative. Early in the morning she asked me to give her a dose of castor oil. I tried to explain to her why she could not have it. She would not listen. Finally I went away from her room. Soon after that Gandhiji came in. She asked him for a dose of castor oil. He also tried to explain to her that castor oil was not good for her in her present condition. "A patient should never try to be his or her own doctor,"



he said. "I would like you to give up using medicines now. Forget everything, even me, and just lose yourself in Ramanama." He came and told me, "I have succeeded in explaining things to Ba. She won't ask for castor oil any more." He was mistaken. Soon afterwards, Dr. Gilder went in to see her and she asked him for a dose of castor oil. He also refused to give it to her. Ba was hurt. When Jaysukhlal Gandhi came to see her in the afternoon, she complained about me and everybody else. "These people try to force their own law upon me. They won't even give me a dose of castor oil," she said.

I had avoided Ba's room for fear that she might again ask me for castor oil. At 2 o'clock I went in to give her some medicine. She looked straight into my eyes and shaking her index finger said, "So you have told everyone not to give me a dose of castor oil. Now, I won't take any of your medicines. Do you wish to exercise your medical authority on me?" What to do in the face of this childish obstinacy was a problem. I could not bear to hurt her. "Ba, I thought you had understood why you should not take castor oil and had given up the idea willingly," I pleaded. "Oh, no," she said. "I want to take castor oil." There was an appealing look on her face and a note of helplessness in her voice. I knew that the end was drawing near. 'Why refuse her anything and give her pain,' I said to myself. "If you insist, I shall be obliged to give it to you much against my judgment," I said. "Then bring it," she said. Someone suggested a way out. "Add a little castor oil to liquid paraffin and give it to her." This was done. She took it and lay down peacefully.

## 32

The imprisonment this time was unusual. The Government had become panicky. It had come to fear that unarmed men and women might destroy its mighty structure. If those in jail established contact with those outside, they did not know what might happen. Therefore, at the time of the August arrests in 1942, Government's orders were that the prisoners were to get no newspapers, they were to have no interviews and they were not to write or receive any letters. Mrs. Naidu had left her daughter on the sick bed. She wrote asking the Government to get her news of her daughter's condition. Ba was also anxious to get news about her children and grandchildren. Mirabehn did not have enough clothes. She wrote to the Inspector-General of Prisons to get her some clothes from the address that she gave. Finally, about the end of August 1942, that is, about three weeks after our arrest, the Inspector-General of Prisons told us that we could write to our relatives about domestic matters if we wished. We were not to mention our whereabouts in the letters. The Government would make arrangements to send on the prisoners' letters to the relatives and the relatives' letters to the prisoners if it thought fit to do so. In the same way we could send for clothes and other things from our homes. Mrs. Naidu wrote to her people. Mirabehn wrote and asked for permission to write to her friends in India. Her own people were across the seas. She had left them to come to India, so that her friends took the place of relatives. Gandhiji wrote to the Government: "I took to Ashram life years ago. For me there is no distinction between relatives and friends. If I cannot write to the widow and son of the late Shri Mahadev

Desai I can have no interest in writing to anyone else. Moreover, I have no domestic matters to write about. I may not write about politics, but if I cannot even write about non-political constructive activities the permission is of no use to me."

Mrs. Naidu and Ba asked me: "Have you written to your mother?" I had asked Gandhiji what I should do and he had advised waiting until the Government's reply to his letter was received. It came after several days. He could write to the inmates of the Ashram in addition to his relatives but the Government could not permit him to write about anything except domestic matters. He decided not to avail of the offer under those conditions and wrote to the Government to that effect. Just at that moment my brother came to his room. Ba and I were already there. Addressing him, Gandhiji said, "I think none of us can agree to write letters under Government's conditions." The Government had sent us a note to let them know the names and addresses of the people with whom we wished to correspond. My brother and I wrote that we could not make use of the facility offered unless the Government made it possible for Gandhiji to do so. Some of our companions thought it was wrong on our parts to have done so. Someone taunted me: "Gandhiji is a Mahatma. You ought to write to your mother. Do you imagine you will become a Mahatma by imitating him in this fashion?" "I have not done it in order to become a Mahatma," I replied. But I felt hurt. Gandhiji asked me during the evening walk why I looked glum and I told him what had happened. "Bapu, I have acted on your advice. Why should people speak to me in that fashion?" I could not help unburdening myself. He was thoughtful for a moment.



"I have told you your duty as I see it," he said. "Ba, you and Pyarelal are part of me. You are here because of me. Therefore, you cannot write when I cannot. But if you have not the strength to follow my advice, or, if, on independent thought, you think your duty is different, you can withdraw your letter to the Government and begin writing home like everyone else." I did not feel any necessity to do so. The very thought was distasteful.

After a few days Ba started writing letters. No one could come to see us in jail; our only contact with the outside world could be through letters. Cut off from her children and other relatives, she felt very lonely and unhappy and eagerly looked forward to their letters. But one-sided correspondence cannot go on for any length of time. So she decided to write to them in reply. She dictated her letters to me and then read them before signing. After handing over her letters to the Jail Superintendent for posting, she tried to persuade me to follow her example. "Bapu is a Sadhu," she said. "He has broken the worldly bonds. We have not reached that state. You ought to write to your mother." ]She went and asked Gandhiji, "Don't you think Sushila ought to write to her mother?" "Well, I have not prohibited her from doing so," he replied. But I felt I ought to stick to my decision. She did not like it. She was a mother. She knew how unhappy a mother feels without any news of her children. Having failed to persuade me, she started writing regularly to Devadas Gandhi and his family and giving detailed news about me and my brother. They lived near my mother and thus Ba saw to it that my mother got all the news about us, if not our letters.

## 33

The second of October, 1943, was Bapu's second birthday in jail. Ba was not keeping very good health. Mrs. Naidu was not there to help us. So we arranged things as best as we could. Ba helped in spite of her poor health and distributed food to the convict prisoners with her own hands. She possessed a red-bordered sari woven out of Bapu's yarn. At the time of leaving Sevagram Ashram, she had entrusted it to Manu. "People say the Ashram will be confiscated. Please see that this sari does not get lost. After my death, my body should be wrapped in this and cremated." After coming to the Aga Khan Palace, she wrote to several people making enquiries about that sari but to no purpose. When Manu came, she told Ba where she had kept it. Ba sent for it and on Bapu's birthday she dressed herself in that sari.

At the end of October, 1943, my second brother's wife gave birth to a baby girl. She had to have a caesarian section and early in November she expired leaving behind a seven days' infant. The jail machinery was so slow that the telegram conveying the news of the operation and the subsequent one announcing her death both reached me eight days after the actual death. My brother's letter also came about that time. He had described how his wife had been asking for me to her last moment. She and I were fast friends. She loved me as her own sister. My brother and mother had applied to the Government for my release on parole, but the Government had refused it. I was with Gandhiji; no one from his camp was to be sent out if they could help it. On hearing all this, Ba's kind heart was deeply touched. She went to Bapu. "Sushila ought to go to see her mother," she said. "Who will look after you

if Sushila goes away?" he asked laughingly. "I know I will be inconvenienced," she said, "but I am not so selfish as not to think of her old mother's need." Then she came to me. "Sushila, you must write to your mother and brother," she almost ordered. "But Ba, I have already written to the Government that I will not be writing any letters. How can I go back upon my word?" I asked.

She went to Bapu. "You must talk to Sushila and persuade her to write home," she said. "What does it matter if she had written to the Government that she would not be writing to anybody? Who could anticipate such a calamity at that time? Brother and sister both must write a letter to their mother and brother and comfort them in their bereavement." Bapu sent for us. "It was at my suggestion that you both decided not to write letters from jail. I am of the opinion that under the special circumstances that have arisen, you ought to write at least once to your mother and brother for the sake of their peace of mind."

That same night we both wrote home. In reply my brother wrote that mother was keeping indifferent health. The care of the motherless infant had become a problem. Bapu joked with Ba. "Shall we send for the baby? You will look after it, won't you?" "I cannot do much in this state of health," Ba replied. "But if the Government would let her come, I shall gladly do what I can." Gandhiji wrote to the Government that the circumstances were such that there was no one to take care of the infant at home. They should let me out on parole so that I could make suitable arrangements or else send the baby to jail. "Sushila is not only a doctor, she is like our own daughter. Her absence even for a few days will cause inconvenience



to us. So the better course would be to send the baby to us in jail. But if that is not possible, we would gladly put up with the inconvenience and request the Government to release her on parole." The Government reply was, "Neither of the two requests can be acceded to."

### 34

In December 1943 Ba was worse. The breathlessness began to interfere with her sleep. We sent for an adjustable bed so that she could sit up or recline at any angle she liked. But the deterioration of her condition was rapid. After a few days even that was not enough. We got a small wooden table made for her. It was put on her bed across her legs. She would rest her arms on this table and then put her head on her arms and go to sleep. It was a most touching scene. After her death, Gandhiji kept that table with him and it was taken with him wherever he went. At meal-times, it served as his dining table.

She became worse and worse. We sent for oxygen. At first she disliked the nasal catheter. But later on she would ask for oxygen herself. Dr. Gilder and I wrote to the Government that we wanted to call Dr. B. C. Roy and Dr. Jivraj Mehta for consultation. Dr. Jivraj Mehta was a Government prisoner in Poona. One evening he was brought to the Aga Khan Palace from Yeravda Prison for a few minutes. Bapu was not to be near Ba when he came. The second consultant, Dr. B. C. Roy, was never brought. Twice we sent reminders, but there was no reply.

As her condition worsened, nursing became more and more taxing. We asked for help and the Government sent

an *aya* who could not stick to the jail and ran away within a week. On the basis of this, the Government said in the Central Legislative Assembly, after her death, that trained nurses had been supplied to look after her!

We asked for nursing help again. The Government said we could send for some relatives. Ba asked for Kanu Gandhi and Prabhavati. As a result of lengthy correspondence, and several weeks after the first request, the Government sent Prabhavati on the 12th of January and Kanu Gandhi on the 1st of February. The end came on the 22nd of February, 1944.

Gandhiji had written to the Government that they should allow Ba and other detenus in the camp to have interviews with their relatives. The Government took no notice of the letter for a long time, but when Ba's illness took a more serious turn they sent for her sons, Ramdas Gandhi and Devadas Gandhi, by wire. Ba was very happy to see them. The interview made her feel very much better. We felt that if Ba could have a weekly interview it would probably do her more good than any medicine.

The Government accepted our suggestion of allowing weekly interviews to Ba. It was difficult for her sons to come every week, so other relatives were also allowed to come to see her. The orders were that none of the other detenus were to be present during the interviews, but how could the patient be left without any nurse? This was pointed out to the authorities and as a result one nurse was allowed to stay. As her condition grew worse, one nurse was not enough at any time. Gandhiji had to write to the Government again. Finally, the orders were issued that the Superintendent could allow as many nurses as he thought necessary.

Ba had asked to consult a Vaidya and the nature cure expert, Dr. Dinshah Mehta, in December. But oral requests hardly ever produced any effect on the Government. Gandhiji had again to carry on lengthy correspondence with the Government officials on this point.

At last on the 5th day of February, Dr. Dinshah Mehta was allowed to come. Oral instructions were received that when he came, no one except the doctors were to be near Ba. This hurt Gandhiji. He was going to his bath when the order was communicated. Generally he rested during massage and bath and even went to sleep. But on that day it was impossible for him to rest. He sent for his secretary, Pyarelalji, and dictated to him a letter to the Government as he lay in his bath. His hands and his voice shook with emotion. "It is unbecoming of the Government to impose such conditions on a dying woman. Supposing she wants the bed-pan when Dr. Dinshah Mehta is there, who is to give it to her if the nurses are not to be near her? Supposing I want to ask the nature cure doctor how my wife is progressing, am I to do so through someone else? This is a curious situation. I would far rather the Government sent me away to another prison, instead of worrying me with pin pricks at every step. If I am away, my wife would not expect any help from me and I will be spared the agony of being a helpless witness to her suffering." The officials were shaken up by that letter. Another oral order was received in the afternoon saying that the morning's communication had been misunderstood. The nurses could stay with the patient and Gandhiji could talk to the doctor about the patient whenever he wanted to. There was no need for him to write about it to the Government!!



Dr. Dinshah was allowed to visit Ba once a day. She wanted him to come twice. Again Gandhiji had to write to the Government and ask for permission. In the end the permission was given.

From December Ba had started asking for a Vaidya. She repeated her request to Col. Bhandari, Col. Shah and the Jail Superintendent whenever they came to see her. In the first week of February, Ba's condition started causing grave anxiety. Gandhiji insisted that the authorities should send for a Vaidya according to her wishes. The jail officials said it was not in their hands; they would phone and ask the Bombay Government. The Bombay Government replied that it was not in their hands; they would phone and ask the Central Government. Thus days passed. All this happened while the patient lay on her death-bed, as it were. Impatient with all this, Gandhiji wrote a strong letter to the Government on the 11th of February. However, before the letter was posted, news was received that the Central Government had left the choice of consultants, doctors, Vaidyas, hakims or nature cure experts to the discretion of the jail doctor, Col. Shah. Gandhiji asked that any local Vaidya be brought without delay. By evening a Vaidya, named Joshi, was brought. He left some medicine with instructions that no other medicine was to be given while the patient was under his treatment.

On the following day Vaidyaraj Shiv Sharma of Lahore arrived, and the patient was put under his treatment. In the middle of the night she was restless. Dr. Gilder and I were helpless. We could not give her any medicine while she was under the Vaidya's treatment. So the Superintendent was awakened and requested to inform the Vaidya of her condition. He did it by telephone. The Vaidya was not allowed to come and see

the patient at night, so he gave instructions on the telephone suggesting giving her a head massage and so on. All that we had tried already without any benefit. The patient had hardly any sleep throughout the night.

After one day, she felt she had had enough of Ayurvedic treatment and requested Dr. Gilder not to give her the Vaidya's medicine any more. We pleaded with her that she must give a fair trial to the new treatment. The Vaidyaraj also requested her on the phone to continue taking his medicine and in the end she agreed to do so.

On the following day she felt so much better that in the evening she went round the verandah in her wheeled chair and then went to little Balkrishna's temple in Mirabehn's room. Gandhiji had gone for a walk in the garden below. He saw her going in the wheeled chair and came to see her. Ba was praying before the image of Balkrishna with closed eyes. When she opened her eyes, she saw him standing in the room. "What brings you here?" she rebuked him with a shy smile. "Go and have your walk." Gandhiji laughed and went back into the garden.

We all felt happy and excited. The atmosphere was filled with hope. If one day's treatment could do her so much good, she would soon be well on the way to recovery and it would be a miraculous achievement of Ayurvedic treatment. The excitement did not last long. At night the restlessness returned. The Superintendent was awakened and he phoned to the Vaidyaraj. The Vaidyaraj was allowed to come to see the patient. He came and gave her a pill which soon sent her to sleep.

Ba's condition was so serious that it was felt that whoever was treating her should stay with her day and

night. The Government would not allow the Vaidya to stay in the Aga Khan Palace at night. He offered to sleep in the car on the road, so that he could come in without delay whenever he was wanted. We were all impressed by his devotion to duty. For three days the good Vaidyaraj slept in the car at the doorsteps of the Aga Khan Palace. Yet it was not easy to call him in when required. First, we had to wake a sepoy, who woke the Jamadar. The Jamadar woke the Superintendent, took the keys from him and brought in the Vaidya. The Superintendent brought him to the patient and stayed with him so long as he was there, escorted him back to the gate and then went back to sleep. All this upset Gandhiji. On the 16th of February it was the Vaidya's 3rd night in the car. He was sent for at 12-30 and went back at 1-30. Gandhiji lay awake in bed. He got up at 2 a.m. and wrote a letter to the authorities saying that the Vaidyaraj must be allowed to sleep in the Aga Khan Palace. He did not like disturbing the whole camp every night. If the permission were not given for the following night, he would stop the Vaidya's treatment. The doctor's treatment had already been stopped, so the patient would be without any treatment whatsoever.

The letter had the desired effect. Permission was given. On the following night the Vaidyaraj slept on Ba's verandah and saw her two or three times at night. He gave her a sleeping dose and she had a better night, comparatively.

On the 18th of February she was again very restless. The Vaidyaraj roamed about in the city through the day searching for certain medicines. He tried several medicines, but the restlessness continued. She had a sleepless night. There was a little fever as well. The patient had a motion due to the medicines given, but



no urine was passed. The kidneys were failing. The Vaidyaraj told Gandhiji after the morning prayers on the 19th that he had done all that he could, but she continued going downhill. He said, "I think the doctors should be given a chance to try their skill now."

On the previous day Gandhiji had said to me: "If there is no improvement in the patient's condition by tomorrow, the Vaidya will probably go away. If the case comes under your care next, my advice will be to stop all medicines and leave her to the sovereign remedy of Ramanama. But that can only happen if you and Dr. Gilder can digest what I say and accept it wholeheartedly."

On the 17th afternoon Ba's eldest son, Harilal Gandhi, had come to see her. She was very pleased to meet him. On learning that he had permission to see her just once, she was very angry. "Why this discrimination between two brothers?" she said. "They allowed Devadas to come every day and they tell Harilal that he can come only once! Let Bhandari, (Inspector-General of Prisons) come to me. I shall ask him why a poor son cannot come to see his mother as freely as the rich one." Gandhiji tried to pacify her. "I shall get permission for him to come every day," he said. Permission was received on the following day but no one could find Harilalbhai's whereabouts. Ba asked for him every day and every day she got the reply that he could not be traced. On the 19th Ba's condition was serious. We were informed that the Government had sent for Ramdas Gandhi and Devadas Gandhi telegraphically and they were searching for Harilal Gandhi.

## 35

On the 19th Ba had continuous oxygen throughout the night. She slept fairly well. But from 5 o'clock on the morning of the 20th she became very restless. She cried out, "Rama, Hei Rama" every few minutes. Her restlessness dampened our spirits still further. Gandhiji came and sat on her bed. She leaned against his shoulder and this soothed her a little. The morning prayer was recited as he sat with her. After that, we all sat with her by turns and sang *bhajans* or Ramadhun. When we were all tired, we played the gramophone. Ba was very fond of a song, "*Shriram bhajo dukhmen sukhmen*" (Call on the name of God in sorrow and in happiness.) She forgot her pain as she listened to this song. At 9-15 a.m. I gave her a dose of chloral and bromide. After that she slept for about an hour and a half. When she awoke, she was feeling a little better. She sat up and washed her teeth and gurgled. She did it so energetically that we wondered from where her strength came. After that she had some tea and went off to sleep again. Medicines she refused to take.

Gandhiji sat on her bed almost throughout the day. His proximity gave her a strange peace of mind. He sent for Dr. Gilder and me. "Please stop all medicines now. Ramanama is the sovereign remedy. I am inclined to say stop all food also except honey and water. If she asks for food, we shall see what to do. I do not believe in medicines. I refused to give them to my children during their most serious illnesses, but I have not forced this rule on Ba. Today she herself is disinclined to take medicines. She has no peace without Ramanama. I have heard nothing but Ramanama come from her lips since this morning. It is a most touching scene, but I

love it. I would certainly stop all medicines while she is in this frame of mind. If God wills it, He will pull her through, else I would let her go, but I won't drug her any longer."

Penicillin had been sent by airplane from Calcutta. Col. Shah and Col. Bhandari brought the news that it had come. Gandhiji had made us stop all medicines. Ba herself was disinclined to take them. What was our duty under the circumstances? Devadasbhai was keen on penicillin being given a trial. He talked to Dr. Gilder and me about it and was about to go out to consult a military doctor. Dr. Mehta was to go with him. Just then Ba called out, "Where is Mehta? Tell him to come and give me a massage." Dr. Mehta was called from the doorsteps. He did not think it advisable to give her massage in that condition. However, in view of Ba's insistence, he gently massaged her arms and legs for 15 minutes, using powder instead of oil, and then went away. She was still resting in my lap in a drowsy condition. After sometime she again called out: "Where is Mehta? Call him. He will do everything for me." Could there be a better certificate for Dr. Mehta from Ba?

I cleaned her face with a wet piece of cloth. Just then Col. Bhandari came in. Devadasbhai had asked for permission to take her photographs. Col. Bhandari had come to enquire what Gandhiji's wishes in the matter were. "I am absolutely indifferent to these things," said Gandhiji. "But if her children and friends and relatives want it, the Government ought to give them the permission."

For days Gandhiji had lived on liquid diet. Ba's illness was putting such a strain on his mind that he could not have maintained his health without cutting



down his food drastically. Moreover, he could not afford to spend half to three quarters of an hour in taking his meal in those days. He finished his liquid meal in 10 minutes after his bath and then went and sat with Ba. Once he came to sit with her he did not feel like leaving her. So he liked to finish his meal and other necessary routine before coming to her bedside.

On the 20th morning Gandhiji insisted that I should go and take a short walk in the garden. When I returned from my walk, Gandhiji was sitting on Ba's bed. Suddenly Ba lay down flat in the bed. For months she had not been able to sleep in that fashion because of breathlessness. We were alarmed and sent for Devadasbhai. He was putting up at Lady Thackersey's place and was just getting ready to have some sleep after a sleepless night. He came immediately. Manu came at the same time. Dr. Mehta had also come back by that time. Bapu asked Ba if she would like to hear a *bhajan* or Ramadhun. She said "no". He asked us to recite Gita in the adjoining room in a soft tone so that Ba could hear it, lying in her bed in the next room. Kanu, Devadasbhai, Pyarelalji and others in turn began the recitation.

On the 20th night, I went to bed at 2 a.m. leaving Dr. Dinshah in charge of the patient. In the morning I learnt that at 4 a.m. her pulse had become very weak and Dr. Gilder had been called. As I went in I saw Dr. Gilder sitting in the chair by her side. Ba was again asking for a dose of castor oil. Dr. Gilder was trying to dissuade her. "The purgative will increase your weakness, Ba. You must not have it."

"What does it matter?" replied Ba. "I am nearing the end in any case."

“Why do you talk in that fashion, Ba?” Dr. Gilder said coaxingly. “Your sons are coming to see you. Devadas will be here today. Ramdas will come tomorrow. You must live.”

Ba smiled at the mention of her sons. Then she became serious. “Why have you sent for them?” she said. “You are all my children, aren’t you? If I die, you will cremate me. As for Ramdas, he should be told not to come. Travelling is expensive and the trains are overcrowded these days.” Ramdas being the most delicate of Ba’s four sons, she had always had a soft corner for him.

Ba had been asking for Harilal every day. Everyone was searching for him, but he could not be found. At last, on the 20th, Swami Anand succeeded in tracing him. Harilalbhai told the Superintendent on the telephone that he would have come during the day but for the fact that he had overslept in the afternoon. We all understood what oversleep in the afternoon meant in his case. Ba was angry. Gandhiji pacified her. At last, on the 21st afternoon, Harilalbhai came. Ba was deeply grieved to see his drunken state and she began to beat her forehead. Harilalbhai had to be removed from her sight.

The excitement brought on an attack of pain in her chest. She had insisted on having castor oil that morning. So I asked Gandhiji if he would allow me to give her some medicine for pain in the chest. His reply was that Ba having insisted on taking castor oil, he could say nothing against other medicines. “Give her what you like.” So I gave her the medicine for the pain and started singing Ramadhun. She was soothed and began to listen attentively.

## 36

Gandhiji used to come to see Ba several times during the night. But she would not allow him to sit with her for any length of time. During the day he came and sat with her for considerable time. Ba in those last days of her life preferred to lean against somebody rather than against the bed rest. When Gandhiji sat on her bed, she would lean against him. Dr. Gilder said to me: "Be careful. Pneumonia is contagious. His face is so near hers that he must be inhaling the pneumonia organisms from her breath. That is not good. I wish he would not sit like this for long." But who could speak to him on the subject?

As weakness increased, the sputum had to be wiped away from her lips whenever she brought it up. The nurse on duty used rags and threw them away after use. Three or four days before her death, as Gandhiji came in to see her during the night, he saw the nurse using the rags. He suggested making small handkerchiefs for the purpose. The next day Manu prepared four new handkerchiefs. Whenever Gandhiji passed by Ba's bedside during the day or night, he picked up the dirty one and washed it. On the first day I intervened. "Bapu, please leave the handkerchiefs. We shall wash them." "Let me do it," he replied. "I like doing it."

One day Gandhiji went to sit on Ba's cot after lunch. Ba was about to go off to sleep. If she slept leaning against his shoulder, he would have had to sit there till she awoke, and this would have deprived him of his midday rest. He looked very tired. I suggested his resting at that time. "Why not come and sit with her after you have had your sleep?" He got up. After coming to his seat he said to me : "What harm would it have done



if you had let me sit there a little longer?" I gave him the reason why I had asked him to leave her, but I felt unhappy. What did it matter if Gandhiji sacrificed his rest for a few days? Why should anybody stand in the way of a thing that gives him peace of mind?

With all this background, how could I dare suggest his not sitting with Ba during the last days of her life out of fear of catching pneumonia? Dr. Gilder saw my point. "Well, let him sit near her but let him not keep his face so near hers," he said. But no one dared say even that to him. The best course I felt was to say nothing. Dr. Gilder also agreed in the end. "Yes, let him do as he likes. After 62 years of partnership, he sees the parting is coming. How can he keep away from her and how can we ask him to do so?" His eyes were moist as he spoke.

One day, before the final phase of Ba's illness, she told Gandhiji that she would like to try hydropathy. Gandhiji took a very keen interest in naturopathy. From the very next day he took up her case and started giving her alternate cold and warm hip baths and sitz baths. He spent nearly an hour over it every afternoon and it tired him. One day she said: "Please go and attend to your work. You have such a lot to do. Sushila will give me the bath." "Don't worry about my work," he replied and continued giving her the treatment. One day he just mentioned how hard pressed he was for time. I said to him: "Bapu, you know I am always ready to serve Ba. So you can save this one hour whenever you like." "I know you are ready to do anything for Ba," he replied. "But God has given me this rare opportunity to serve her in the evening of my life. I consider it invaluable. So long as Ba will accept my services, I will gladly spare the time for her."

At about 6-30 p.m. on the 21st of February, Devadas Gandhi, Manu (daughter of Shri Harilal Gandhi) and Santokbehn arrived at the Aga Khan Palace. Ba was deeply moved to see them. She began to weep. She had not yet got over the grief of seeing Harilalbhai drunk. She addressed Devadasbhai. "The burden of looking after the family will have to be borne by you. Bapu is a saint. He has to think of the whole world. And you know all about Harilal. So the care of the family must fall to your lot."

Manu sang hymns and Ba liked it very much. She would have liked Manu and Santokbehn to stay with her at night. But the Government would not permit it. Devadasbhai was allowed to stay with his mother. He went to see them off. Ba went to sleep leaning against my shoulder. But her sleep did not satisfy me. It was not a refreshing natural sleep. It was drowsiness consequent on suppression of urine. At 11-30 p.m. Prabhavati relieved me. Ba said to her, "Come, we shall both go to bed." She was obviously not aware that she was in bed already. Just as she spoke she had a spasm of cough. The end was near. Devadasbhai stood near her cot and ministered to her. I sat on the floor near the shaded table lamp and began writing Ba's health diary. She had been complaining of a headache. Devadasbhai began gently massaging her head. After sometime he thought that Ba had fallen asleep and stopped the massage. Suddenly Ba shouted, "Sushila, even you are tired?" I rushed to her side. "No, Ba, there is no question of my being tired," I said and began massaging her head. There were symptoms of mental confusion. Uraemia was setting in. At 2-00 a.m. she fell asleep. At 2-45 I went to bed. Devadasbhai kept standing by her side till 5 a.m. The hour of parting was fast approaching.

His face looked grave and very soft and kind. The deep love and concern for the frail little woman, his mother, grappling with death before his eyes had transfigured it.

## 37

On the 22nd morning I got up at 7 a.m. and went in to have a wash. As I was washing in the bathroom next to Ba's room she shouted, "Sushila!" I went to her bedside. "What is it, Ba?" I asked. "Sushila, take me into the room, take care of me," she said. I pointed to the picture bearing "Hei Rama," which was hanging on the wall near her bed. "You are in your own room, Ba," I said. "Here is your favourite picture." She was quiet for a moment. Then she spoke again. "Take me inside. Take me to Bapu's room." Then I thought, "May be she wants to see Gandhiji." He was having breakfast in the adjoining room. I sent word to him to come to Ba before going down for a walk.

Ba was resting in my lap. Suddenly she looked in my face. "Sushila, where am I going? Am I dying?" Whenever Ba had talked in that fashion in the past, I had pleaded with her not to have gloomy thoughts. "Why do you talk in that fashion? We shall all go home from here," I used to tell her. I did not have the heart to do so today. "Ba, we all must die one day," I replied. "Some will go earlier, some later. What difference does it make as to when we go?" She nodded "Yes", then closed her eyes and lay back reclining on my shoulder, half drowsy.

After a short while Gandhiji came in. He stood by her side for some time, stroking her head, and hands, etc. Then he said to her, "May I go for my walk now?" Ba had never allowed him to stay with her for any length of time at the time of his walk in the past. She would



tell him to go for his walk or to go to sleep or to go and attend to his work. But strangely enough on that day when he asked her if he could go, she said "No." So he sat down on her bed. She rested her head on his breast and leaning against him lay quietly with closed eyes. There was ineffable peace and satisfaction on the faces of both. It was a sacred sight. Reverentially we all moved away on tiptoe. Gandhiji sat with her till 10 a.m. Every now and then he told her to take shelter with Ramanama. Whenever she coughed, he stroked her and soothed her.

Devadasbhai, Pyarelalji and I sat talking at the breakfast table in the next room. Devadasbhai told us how a Government official had explained to him why the Government did not release Ba. "Supposing we release her," he had said, "and her condition becomes serious after release! There will be a demand for the release of your father. And if we do not release him, we will be called heartless brutes."

At 10 a.m. Ba allowed Gandhiji to leave her. I took his place on her bed. She was drowsy. For the first time today she had not washed. I tried to clean her mouth with boroglycerine, but she did not want even that.

Ba had had difficulty in swallowing since the previous night. She did not like to drink even water. Devadasbhai had brought Gangajal (Ganges water) with him. Bits of Tulsi leaves had been added to the Gangajal. "Devadas has brought Gangajal for you," Bapu told her. She opened her mouth and Bapu poured in a spoonful saying: "Take more afterwards." She closed her eyes and lay back. Along with "Rama, Hei Rama" Ba also used to call out to Gangaji. A drink of Gangajal gave her great peace of mind.

After his bath and a light meal Gandhiji again took his place by Ba's bedside. Visitors started coming in. In order to give a chance to the newcomers to sit near her, he got up from Ba's bed and went and sat down on his mat on the floor nearby. After a little while, Santokbehn, Keshubhai and Ramibehn arrived. Ba sat up and began to talk to them. To Santokbehn she said: "Devadas has put up with a lot of inconvenience for my sake. He has served me so indefatigably." To Devadasbhai she said: "You have served me well, now do your duty towards the family." "What have I done for you, Ba?" replied Devadasbhai. "I came last night only. It is your companions here who have been serving you." But she had derived great satisfaction from his presence near her in her last hours.

"Ramdasbhai is coming, Ba," said Devadasbhai. "Why should he?" she asked. She could not bear the idea of Ramdas suffering any inconvenience.

Looking at Bapu, she said: "Do not sorrow after my death. It should be an occasion for rejoicing." Then she closed her eyes, and folded her hands and began to pray, "O, Lord! I have filled my belly like an animal. Forgive me. I pray for your grace. I want to be your devotee and love you with all my heart. I want nothing else."

At 5-30 in the evening Col. Shah and Col. Bhandari came to ask Gandhiji what his decision was with regard to penicillin. "Let her have it," he replied, "if Sushila and Dr. Gilder wish to give it to her." Dr. Gilder knew Gandhiji's wishes in the matter. He was not enthusiastic about giving it. We had a talk with Devadasbhai. There were two aspects to the question. Bapu's opinion was to let her rely on God and die in peace. Why bother her with medicines on her death-bed? There was something

in that. On the other hand, one felt, why give up hope while there was life, why not continue our efforts to save her? This was the line of reasoning of a detached scientist. Devadasbhai belonged to this group and I was also inclined to think along that line. Dr. Gilder told him that we were prepared to give her penicillin if he wished it after considering the question from every aspect. Under his instructions, I went to boil my syringe and needles. Gandhiji called me. "What have you people decided?" he asked. "We will give her penicillin," I replied. "Do you both believe that it should be given?" he continued his queries. "Are you sure it will do her good?" I could not say "Yes." It was just a trial. The patient was almost in a moribund condition. How could I say for certain that penicillin or for that matter, anything would help her. "Please talk to Dr. Gilder about it," I replied and went away.

Dr. Gilder was called by Gandhiji. He came to me afterwards. "Gandhiji did not know penicillin has to be given by injections," he said. "Having learnt that giving penicillin means injections every three hours, he does not want us to give it to her." I took the syringe from the boiler and packed it with a mixed feeling of disappointment and relief.

Gandhiji was pleading with Devadasbhai. "Why don't you trust God? Why do you wish to drug your mother even on her death-bed?" The discussion delayed him from going for a walk. Every day he went down into the garden at 6-30 p.m. sharp. Today, because of all these talks, it was 7-15 and he was still upstairs. At last he went into the bathroom to get ready for the walk. Just then Ba called out "Bapu". Prabhavati had been sitting with her. He came and sat by her on the bed, telling Kanu that he was not to take any photographs.



Kanu had longed to photograph Ba and Bapu together. He was disappointed and so were we.

Ba was very restless. Twice she sat up and again lay down. Bapu asked her: "What is the matter? What do you feel?" Like an innocent child standing on the brink of the unknown, she replied in a lisping way: "I do not know". Kanu and I stepped on to the verandah in front of Ba's room and grumbled at the fact that Gandhiji would not let Kanu take a photograph of him with Ba. "He does not object to people taking his photographs unawares ordinarily. Why does he do so today?" we wondered. "What a fine photo it would have been." We did not realize that a photo would have marred the sanctity of those last moments of Bapu and Ba together.

Just then Ba's brother, Madhavdas, came up. Ba recognized him. Tears rushed to her eyes, but she could not speak. I came in from the verandah. Ba tried to sit up for the last time. But Gandhiji dissuaded her. "Why not keep lying down?" he said. She put her head on his lap and lay back. The eyes began to lose their lustre. There were a few hiccups and a gurgling sound from the throat. She opened her mouth, three or four gasps, and all was still. She was at last free from all bondage. Gandhiji had wondered in whose lap she would pass away. Who would be the fortunate one to render her this last service. None deserved it better than he.

Gandhiji removed the pillow from under her head and asked someone to put the raised end of the bed down to make it level. In the afternoon, Mirabehn had put the bed north and south — the direction in which orthodox Hindus put the patient before death. Everyone started singing Ramadhun. I stood there like a statue. In spite of being a doctor and having witnessed a number

of deaths, I have yet to learn to look at death with detachment.

Ba expired exactly at 7-35 p.m. Devadasbhai put his head on her breast and calling her again and again wept like a child. A tear stood in the corner of Gandhiji's eyes also. But he collected himself, got up and gave instructions to remove everything from the room. Mathuradas Trikamji — Gandhiji's nephew — had been standing at the gate of the Aga Khan Palace along with his family. He was not permitted to come in and have a last glimpse of Ba in life. After her death, Gandhiji secured permission for him to come in. Perhaps the Government were afraid that the news of Ba's death in detention might lead to some kind of disturbance among the people. Strict instructions were issued that no one was to leave the detention camp without Government's permission.

Bapu, Manu, Santokbehn and I bathed the dead body, washed and combed her hair and wrapped her up in the sari made of Gandhiji's yarn which she had particularly designated for her last journey. Lady Thackersey had sent a sari washed in Gangajal. That was used as a second winding sheet. Santokbehn put Gandhiji's yarn on her arms as bangles, put a necklace of fine Tulsi beads around her neck and covered her forehead with sandalwood paste.

Manu and Kanu had swept and cleaned Ba's room in the meantime. Mirabehn had marked an oblong space with whitewashing on which to lay the dead body. She arranged flowers in her hair and round the head. There was a gentle smile and peace on the dead face. The wrinkles were less marked. She appeared to be asleep. We all sat down for prayers. The whole of Gita was recited. The prayer took one hour and a half.

Shantikumarbhai said something about bringing sandalwood for cremation. Gandhiji would not hear of it. "Ba was a poor man's wife. How can a poor man afford to bring sandalwood for cremation?" The Superintendent of our detention camp interposed. "I have got some sandalwood for that purpose," he said. "You, that is to say the Government, can use anything that you like," he replied. "I have no objection to accepting your sandalwood for Ba's cremation." The wood of one whole sandalwood tree was produced and used for the cremation. It was afterwards learnt that it had been collected there earlier under Governmental instructions in anticipation of Gandhiji's death during his fast in the previous year.

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Soon after Ba's death the Inspector-General of Prisons enquired of Gandhiji on behalf of the Government what his wishes were with regard to the cremation. Gandhiji put three alternatives before them in the order of preference:

1. "The body should be entrusted to her sons and relatives. That means that there will be a public funeral and the Government will not interfere with it in any way.

2. "As in the case of late Mahadev Desai, the cremation should take place in the compound of the Aga Khan Palace and friends and relatives should be allowed to be present.

3. "If the Government will allow relatives and not friends, I would rather have no outsiders at all. I and my companions in jail will attend to the cremation by ourselves."



He appealed to the Government to do gracefully whatever they decided to do. He did not want any more pin pricks. If they allowed a public funeral, he was prepared to give them the assurance that they need not fear any violent demonstrations. His sons would lay down their lives to prevent such a thing.

“Will you ask to be present if cremation takes place outside?” he was asked.

“No,” he replied. “My sons, friends and relatives will see to everything. I will not go outside.”

But the Government were not prepared to allow a public funeral. A public funeral would have meant a big procession. It would have led to further awakening and enthusiasm amongst the people. How could they take such a risk? So they accepted the second alternative.

It was nearly 11 p.m. by the time all this was over. All the outsiders except Devadasbhai, Manu and Santok-behn were asked to leave the camp. We kept watch by the body by turns. The morning prayer was held near the dead body of Ba. Gandhiji took his seat near her head and there he sat till she was taken for cremation.

On the 23rd of February, friends and relatives started coming in from 7 a.m. There was a collection of about 150 people. Manu Mashruwala offered “Arati” to the dead body. Everyone made obeisance. There was a heap of floral offerings. Friends of every community — Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians and Englishmen — were present. The Brahmin who had performed the last rites for Mahadevbhai arrived. Devadasbhai was selected by him to perform the last rites for his mother.

After the body had been placed on the funeral pyre, Gandhiji offered a short prayer. It consisted of bits of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsi prayers. Devadasbhai lighted the fire.

Shantikumarbhai helped Devadasbhai throughout. The arrangement of the funeral pyre had been faulty. The firewood arranged underneath the body was not enough. It was difficult to put more firewood in and get it under the corpse when the pyre was ablaze. Kanu Gandhi's hair and eyelashes were singed in the effort to do so.

The funeral pyre was arranged by the side of Mahadevbhai's Samadhi. The thought came to my mind that Ba's tender motherly heart could not bear the idea of leaving Mahadevbhai, who had become more than a son to Ba and Bapu, all alone. She had decided to stay behind with him.

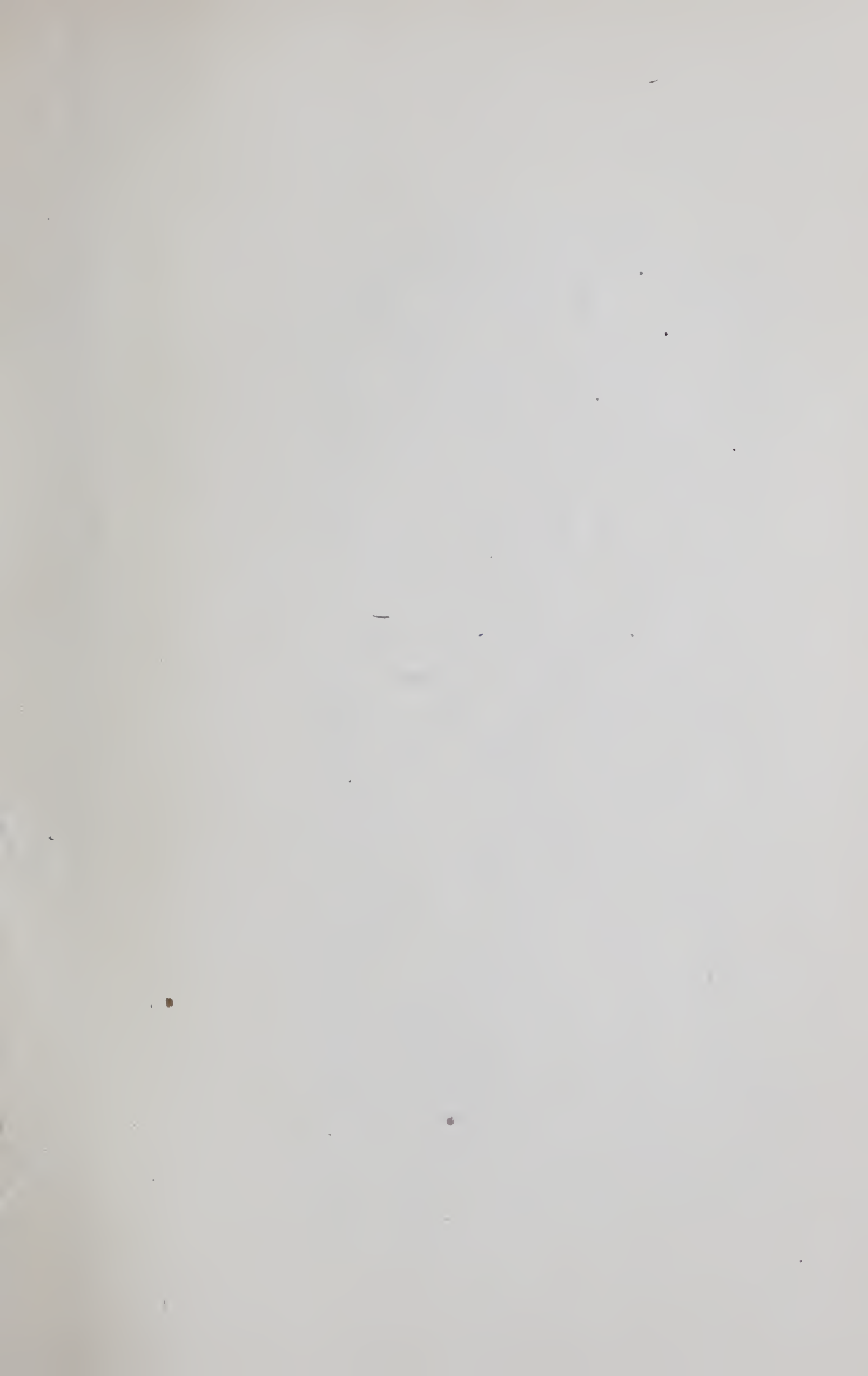
Ba's body had become water-logged. The cremation took a long time and Gandhiji and many of the friends stayed on the cremation ground till 4 p.m. Several times it was suggested that he should go and rest, but he refused to do so. "How can I leave her like this after 62 years of companionship? I am sure she won't forgive me for that," he replied laughingly. But he was experiencing deep pain at the parting. He was a sage and a great man but with all that, he was most human. When everybody had left, we had a glimpse of what was passing within his breast. As he lay in his bed at night, he remarked: "I cannot imagine life without Ba. I had always wished her to go in my hands so that I would not have to worry as to what will become of her when I am no more. But she was an indivisible part of me. Her passing away has left a vacuum which will never be filled." There was silence for a few minutes. Then he turned to me. "How God has tested my faith! If I had allowed you to give her penicillin, it could not have saved her. But it would have meant bankruptcy of faith on my part. I pleaded with Devadas to convince him

of the soundness of my decision. The idea of giving a trial to penicillin was finally dropped and Ba got ready to go. And she passed away in my lap! Could it be better? I am happy beyond measure.”

Ramdasbhai arrived late in the evening. The funeral pyre was still burning. Devadasbhai and Ramdasbhai were allowed to stay in the Aga Khan Palace for three days. On the fourth day half calcined pieces of bones and ashes were collected and the two brothers left us with the remains of their mother.

We took our floral offerings to the two Samadhis both morning and evening every day. In the morning we recited the 12th chapter of Gita there. Gandhiji used to make a cross of flowers at the foot of Mahadevbhai's Samadhi. At the foot of Ba's Samadhi we decided to make a Swastika with flowers. Some people wondered whether Gandhiji had taken to idol worship, so to say. Our daily pilgrimage to the two Samadhis was not an indication of idol worship. It was in appreciation of the great qualities of the two departed souls. It was our prayer to God to enable us to follow in their footsteps.







## THE AUTHOR

Sushila Nayar joined Mahatma Gandhi in 1937 after obtaining her degree in medicine from Lady Hardinge Medical College, and continued to be his personal physician till the end. She came back to her studies in 1939 and had just obtained her doctorate in medicine when she was arrested and put in prison with Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba during the Quit India movement. After Gandhiji's death she went abroad in 1948 for further post graduate studies at Johns Hopkins and secured a doctorate in public health. Shortly after her return to India she became Minister of Health in Delhi State. She is now a Member of Parliament. Her memories of 21 months' stay with Gandhiji in prison entitled *Bapuki Karavas Kahani* was adjudged by the Ministry of Education to be a book of outstanding merit and was awarded the President's first prize.



